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As *Abbott Elementary*'s hilarious principal, Janelle James has found success on her own terms: 'I'll only diet for a Marvel movie'

By Emily
Longeretta

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by JD Barnes

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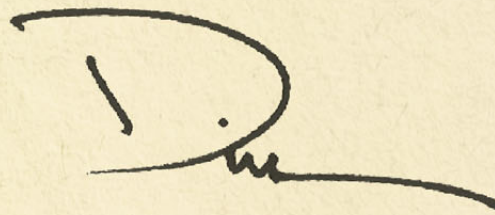
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It's Time for Breakfast With the Principal



CO-EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Cynthia Littleton

Ramin Setoodeh

Investing in education is a time-honored path to a successful career. It has certainly worked for "Abbott Elementary" star Janelle James.

The multi-hyphenate is riding the tail of her swiftly rising star after emerging as a fan favorite in her role as a school principal, the fast-talking, conspiracy-theory-believing, man-hunting reality-TV devotee Ava Coleman.

Variety senior TV features editor Emily Longeretta's profile gets to the heart of James' climb, which came about through a mix of stand-up comedy, writing for such shows as "Black Monday" and "The Run-down With Robin Thede" and acting gigs.

James is a bit transactional in the way that's common to performers who regularly go on tour, who never quite know when and where their next meal

is coming from. "During our interview over breakfast," Longeretta says, "James double-checked that I wasn't paying before ordering eggs, bacon and a waffle. The order came up many times during our chat since she only takes roles where she can eat whatever she wants."

From a tight focus on James, we pan out with a look at the state of late-night comedy talk shows. It's not a funny picture. Inside of a few years, one of TV's hottest dayparts has become much chillier. In years past, hosts would never voluntarily give up their precious thrones, but Trevor Noah has decamped from "The Daily Show" and James Corden is right behind him, leaving his show later this month. Brian Steinberg, our New York-based senior TV editor, goes deep on a sector he knows well to explain this surprising reversal of fortune. 🍳

Contributors



Senior TV features editor **Emily Longeretta** took a break from Emmy issues to write her first *Variety* cover story. She couldn't pass up waffles and bacon with Janelle James in Beverly Hills.



Senior TV editor **Brian Steinberg**, who writes about challenges facing late-night TV, is a big fan of the daypart and often tweets news about the shows under the name NITE OWL.



"Laying out these lists is like playing Tetris; you have to crack the code," says associate art director **Doug Thomson**, who designed this week's Power of Law compilation. He's previously designed lists for *Variety*'s Hitmakers, Lifestyle Leaders and Power of Women issues.



Photographer **JD Barnes** captured Janelle James in New York on April 5: "Working with Janelle and *Variety* was such a great collaboration. The trust provided and the laughs shared on set made for an amazing and much-appreciated experience."

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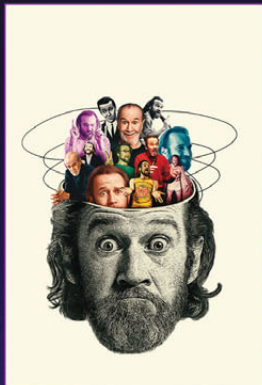
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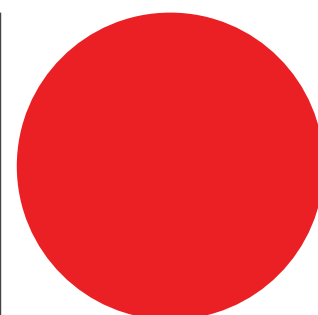
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BIZ + BUZZ

Getting to Sleep In

Ryan Seacrest on leaving 'Live,' hitting his snooze button and what's next for America's favorite host

By Angelique Jackson



Monday morning started out just like any other day for Ryan Seacrest. The alarm went off at 5:45 a.m. and he got straight to work.

Except this time, he wasn't in New York City leaving for the "Live With Kelly and Ryan" studio, where he'd do "Host Chat" perched next to Kelly Ripa. Instead, he threw off the covers and leaned into a microphone at his bedside to start "On Air With Ryan Seacrest" on Los Angeles' KIIS-FM. You see, last Friday marked his final episode of

“

I've become more comfortable letting things just happen without thinking about what has to come next. It can really go in any direction.” — Ryan Seacrest

“Live,” and after six years of working six jobs at once, life as he knew it had changed.

“The benefit of radio is I can do it remotely,” Seacrest says. “I will be able to jump out of bed, slip into my Uggs, make my coffee and be on the radio. And flip on ‘Live With Kelly and Mark’ in the back-ground while I’m on air.”

A few days before Seacrest signed off for the last time, he sat down with *Variety* to discuss his decision to leave the show. He was running a few minutes late for the Zoom interview, scheduled for 1:30 p.m. ET, shortly after the end of that day’s radio show — which itself began minutes after the credits rolled on “Live.” It’s both impressive and insane how packed Seacrest’s schedule is, but he’s been doing things this way forever.

For more than two decades, Seacrest has been the ultimate on-air personality, hosting “American Idol” for 21 seasons, along with “On Air With Ryan Seacrest” and “American Top 40” for 19 years each. Add to that 18 editions of “Dick Clark’s New Year’s Rockin’ Eve,” as well as gigs on “E! News” and “Live From the Red Carpet.” But Seacrest was still nervous to be in front of a new audience when he joined “Live.”

“When I started the show, I’d done a lot of live broadcasting and storytelling on the radio, but never on television in this kind of format,” he says. “Kelly has been doing this for a long time, on this show, on this stage at this desk. How would I do? I wanted to prove to myself and to the audience that that was the right choice, so I put pressure on myself at the beginning.”

The “Host Chat” segment at the beginning of the show, where Seacrest and Ripa recap their previous day, forced him to broaden his horizons and find time for hobbies. That led him to more fully embrace food culture.

“I found a relaxed, slowed-down version of myself on the air,” he says. “I’ve become more comfortable letting things just happen without thinking about what has

to come next. Because it can really go in any direction.”

The week before his final episode, “Live” went on spring hiatus and Seacrest jetted to Italy for a vacation. But he wasn’t just lounging around. “I was looking back at the six years and remembering when initially it was just going to be three,” he says. “And then with each year that went by, I continued to extend my contract because I love sitting next to my partner and having this unique and casual connection to the people that watch.”

Since Seacrest joined, “Live” has consistently performed well with audiences. As of his second-to-last week on air, “Live” celebrated its 29th consecutive week as the No. 1 syndicated talk show across all key Nielsen measures, a position it has held for the past three years. And in 2019, Ripa and Seacrest won a Daytime Emmy for outstanding

entertainment talk show hosts.

During his tenure, programs like “The View” and “The Talk” got more political — particularly during Donald Trump’s presidency — but “Live” stuck to its lighter format.

“That may be why people came to watch, because it was different from others that did turn that direction,” Seacrest suggests. “We were relief from a lot of the heavy news, from the division in the country, and we are mindful of that when we’re on the air. We’re mindful of the level of fun the show should be, and counter-programming to anything that is political. And frankly, I’m more comfortable with that. We felt like this is a place where people can enjoy, laugh, smile, forget and escape the heavier things.”

During his fourth year on “Live,” Seacrest began thinking about exiting and brought Ripa into the discussion. “A year before the announcement, we made the decision on the date,” he says. Then on Feb. 16, he shared the news with viewers.

“It becomes real when you’re on a national broadcast and you’re live looking into that camera,” he recalls. “You’re thinking of the right words to convey gratitude, and the bittersweetness of the moment.”

Now that “Live” is over, Seacrest is focused on “American Idol,” which begins airing live episodes on April 23. How much longer does he plan to work on the singing competition show? “I hope to host that show forever,” Seacrest says.

Remember: When “Idol” ended the first time in 2016, Seacrest signed off with the cryptic quip, “Goodnight America ... for now,” as the credits faded to black.

“That was manifesting, putting it into the universe, creating that karma, that it would come back. I didn’t know anything,” he says. As fate would have it, the weekend he moved to NYC for “Live,” ABC picked up “Idol.”

“There I was thinking, ‘How am I going to go back and forth and do this? I will figure out a way,’” Seacrest remembers. “And I’ve racked up some air miles.” 🍷

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Seacrest’s next ventures take him into the world of food, satisfying the whims of his 12-year-old self, who relished family dinners at local Atlanta restaurants as a reward for getting good grades.

“I knew I wanted to be a broadcaster, but my fallback plan was to be a chef, to be around food and learn how to do it well,” Seacrest recalls. “I was very much into the performance aspect of how a kitchen worked, and how it was served. It was like backstage and onstage.”

His curiosity about food culture has developed into a business venture: Seacrest formed an agricultural company four and a half years ago to study the process of producing extra virgin olive oil and organic wine. “Soon, we’ll be setting up a kiosk for me to sell some of these things,” he says. The label will be called “Concento,” which means “The story of why you come.”

Ryan Seacrest Foundation

Seacrest is also focused on giving back via his foundation, which will open broadcast media centers in Memphis, New York City and Salt Lake City-area pediatric hospitals this year. Established in 2009 with an emphasis on creating a cheery environment for hospitalized children and their families, Seacrest Studios also serves as a launching pad for local college students who intern there.

“Part of the vision was to have a place for the junior varsity to train, have experience and see what aspects they love about broadcasting,” he explains. “Being live and immediate is so near and dear to my heart, it’s really the only thing I know how to do.”

Seacrest with Camila Cabello and a Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia patient in 2018





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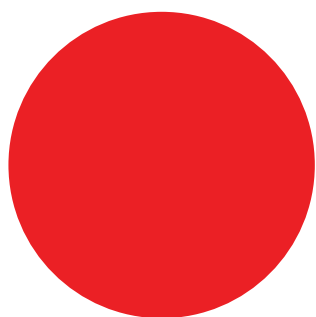
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Fresh Paint and New Curtains

The HBO Max relaunch vows to repackage existing content with a better interface and improved curation

By Michael Schneider



When WarnerMedia launched HBO Max in 2020, the idea for the service was to offer something for everyone: drama, comedy, unscripted, kids and family. Now it's 2023, Warner Bros. Discovery is relaunching the service as Max, and it's promising to offer something for everyone: drama, comedy, unscripted, kids and family.

Meet the new Max, (mostly) the same as the old Max. But sometimes you need a fresh coat of

paint, and a new name, for an extreme streamer makeover. And that's what WBD is doing with Max 2.0, this time embracing and more fully promoting the content it has flowing in from the likes of Cartoon Network and, now, the suite of Discovery lifestyle networks (think HGTV, Food Network, Magnolia Network).

HBO's gold-standard fare is still part of the main draw — “privileged” in the newly improved Max user interface, executives assure — but so is gold-plated Warner Bros. content, including a seven-series spin on the “Harry Potter” tomes and a “Big Bang Theory” spinoff, in addition to expanded DC and “Game of Thrones” universes.

Warner Bros. Discovery is essentially reviving the same pitch to audiences it made three years ago with HBO Max: This is a must-have

service with content for everyone in the household. For the do-over to work, it'll have to either do a better job selling the concept of Max to consumers or make it a demonstrably easier product to use.

The jury is out on both of those propositions. In renaming HBO Max as just “Max,” WBD is removing the most identifiable part of the name and risks losing brand awareness. Then again, that may be the point.

The new name “signals an important change from two narrow products — HBO Max and Discovery+ — to the broader content offering and consumer proposition of Max,” said JB Perrette, Warner Bros. Discovery's CEO-president of global streaming and games, at a press event on April 12. In other words, HBO was seen as too upscale or narrow for consumers who wouldn't buy

into HBO Max, and Discovery+ (still available as a stand-alone platform) is similarly niche.

“We all love HBO. And it's a brand that has been built over five decades to be the edgy, groundbreaking trendsetter in entertainment for adults. But it's not exactly where parents would most eagerly drop off their kids,” Perrette added.

Will consumers suddenly gravitate to Max as a broad-based service if they didn't when it was HBO Max? The marketing message will be crucial in that regard. One way HBO Max faltered was in not better highlighting its vast array of Warner Bros. kids fare, such as the Looney Tunes and Hanna-Barbera libraries, in addition to “Sesame Street” and the library of Cartoon Network originals.

Will it now? That remains to be seen when the new interface is unveiled May 23. But WBD CEO David Zaslav and Perrette, his top lieutenant for streaming, are promising a more intuitive user interface and tuned-up recommendation engines that will direct audiences to the shows they want to see versus whatever is new on the platform. “The reality is, there's a lot of stuff that machines can do much better. And that's where we've invested a lot to develop and provide personalization across the entirety of the experience, not just a few rails on the homepage,” Perrette said.

After much buildup to the April 12 unveiling of plans for Max, Team Zaslav pulled a “That's not all, folks” by promising to come back soon with details on how news and sports — aka CNN and TBS/TNT — figure into WBD's future.

Bottom line: Max's fate hinges on whether WBD can sell the streamer as a new product. Viewers will have to be dazzled by a much-improved user experience and the value of marrying top-tier lifestyle destination channels with HBO et al.

Max's new tagline is “The One to Watch.” Whether consumers will agree is still an unknown. But when it comes to keeping tabs on the future of Warner Bros. Discovery, that's certainly truth in advertising. 🎯

Anatomy of a Megadeal

How flight attendant-turned-novelist T.J. Newman inspired a Hollywood bidding war

By Brent Lang

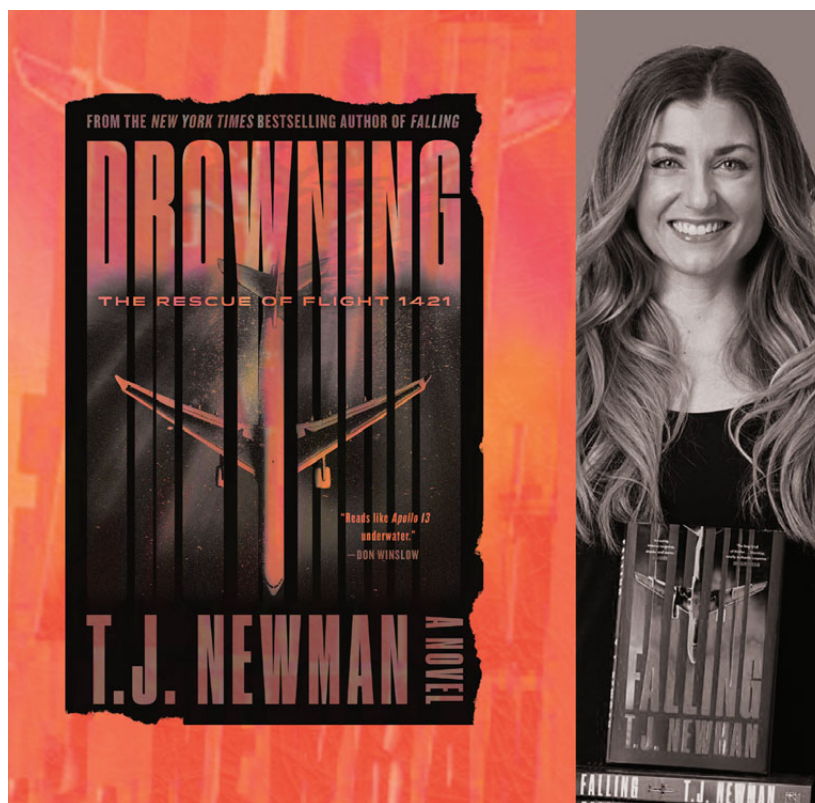


Three years ago, T.J. Newman was handing out peanuts and pouring drinks for passengers. Last month, she was hustling between Zoom calls with Nicole Kidman and Jerry Bruckheimer as they tried to outbid each other for the rights to “Drowning,” her upcoming novel about a jetliner that crashes into the ocean. It’s all part of an improbable Cinderella story that’s taken Newman, a flight attendant turned bestselling writer, from manning first-class cabins to becoming one of Hollywood’s most in-demand talents.

Newman admits she still hasn’t accepted her change in fortunes. “Any time I board a plane, I still want to get up and collect trash or help someone put their bag in an overhead bin,” she says. “I have to remind myself: You can sit and order a drink instead of serving it.”

These days, she can spring for Champagne. Landing the movie rights to “Drowning” triggered an all-out bidding war, one that drew interest from the likes of Kidman, Alfonso Cuarón and Steven Spielberg, along with seven-figure offers from Apple and Bruckheimer, Paramount and Damien Chazelle, Legendary, Universal Television, and Warner Bros.

“There was an eight-hour period where I never hung up my phone,” says Shane Salerno, Newman’s agent. “People would call my landline, and I’d put them



Warner Bros. secured the movie rights to T.J. Newman’s second book, “Drowning.”

on mute while I answered a call from another bidder on my cell phone. I’d get an offer and before we had a chance to counter, they’d text me and raise it.”

For Newman, the adulation had its share of unexpected hurdles. “Shane would call and say we need to get on a Zoom with Nicole Kidman in 15 minutes, and I’d go, ‘Oh, my God, I have to wash my hair.’” It also meant confessing to Bruckheimer, the producer of “Top Gun: Maverick,” that she caught the Tom Cruise sequel in theaters eight times.

Yet it was Warner Bros. and

not Bruckheimer that prevailed, agreeing to pay \$1.5 million for the rights and an additional \$1.5 million on the first day of production. The studio also brought the “Drowning” writer on as an executive producer.

Most writers wait a lifetime to get that kind of payday. But what’s extraordinary is that it’s the second time in two years that Newman has been the center of a fevered auction. “Falling,” her debut novel about a pilot pressured to crash his plane after his family is kidnapped by terrorists, sold to Universal Pictures for \$1.5

million. That was after more than a dozen producers and studios submitted bids, including Neil Moritz, Jason Bateman and Matt Reeves. As part of the deal, Newman is writing the screenplay. It’s hard to believe that just a few years ago, in the first flush of success from “Falling’s” robust sales, Newman’s mother was convinced that she shouldn’t quit her day job and risk losing her perk of flying for free.

“You never know with this entertainment stuff,” she warned. But after “Falling” sold its movie rights, she relented, agreeing her daughter should devote herself full time to her new career.

Even as Newman enjoys her financial freedom, she remembers the rejection she faced. Before becoming a flight attendant, she tried to make it as an actress in New York. But that dream didn’t pan out, forcing her to move back to her parents’ home.

“I’m an overnight success story if overnight takes two decades,” she says.

And when she got more invested in her writing, penning her first novel on red-eye flights as passengers slept, she grappled with the indifference of publishers. By the time she submitted the manuscript for “Falling” to Salerno, Newman had been turned down by more than 40 companies. She had reached the fuck-it phase and included a handwritten note that caught Salerno’s attention with its brashness. She told him her book would be a bestseller and she hoped he’d be smart enough to see it.

“I had nothing left to lose,” she admits. “It was a Hail Mary pass.”

There Will Be Blood

'Evil Dead Rise' director stays true to the legacy while making the year's goriest movie

By William Earl



"I met with [producer] Rob Tapert and Sam in L.A. and gave them the pillars of the story," he says. "I had the conversation in a room with them for 15 minutes and left. My agents rang me and said, 'Evil Dead' is yours.' And I'm like, 'What does that mean?' And they said, 'It's yours to lose if you don't get it right.' So then you really have to double down to start writing."

In terms of the story, "Rise" goes in wildly different directions from previous chapters while retaining the gonzo vibe. The first two "Evil Dead" movies centered on leading man Bruce Campbell battling evil in a cabin in the woods. Cronin's vision is, at its core, a heartfelt story about a mother, her sister and her three children fighting for survival in a large apartment complex. Despite the changes, Cronin says Raimi had one key piece of advice for fitting into the "Evil Dead" world.

"Sam is a really good, simple communicator," Cronin says. "His advice: Make sure the Deadites are really scary and use the book. My answer was 'Of course.' It's an interesting insight into Sam and his trust when he hires a filmmaker. He wasn't making the assumption that I'd do those things; he just wanted me to tell my story my way."

But the ultimate seal of approval for an "Evil Dead" movie is scaring the shit out of audiences. At last month's rowdy SXSW world premiere, crowd reactions proved that Cronin delivered — and horror Twitter hasn't stopped buzzing.

"I watched at the European premiere last night and sat in a room of people that were so terrified, and I thought, 'Oh, my God, this film is so hardcore. I can't believe what I've done here. I feel really bad for everybody in the room,'" Cronin says. 🍷



Lee Cronin is very particular about blood.

Cronin, the Irish writer and director of "Evil Dead Rise," the fifth feature installment in the cult horror series, lights up when discussing gore on set.

"We used 6,500 liters [1,717 gallons] of blood on the movie," he said. "That is real, sticky, cooked movie blood. We had to hire out this industrial kitchen to cook the blood and keep it fresh, be able to heat it up, because characters are covered in it. There was a lot of management of liquid in this movie. I wanted blood to be a character, so it was important we got the viscosity and look just right."

Beyond that, Cronin was keen to keep every element of the production top-notch, given the legacy of Sam Raimi's series. Before Raimi

was a blockbuster name, helming the "Spider-Man" trilogy of the 2000s and VFX-heavy projects like 2022's "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness," he got his start directing the 1981 microbudget hit "The Evil Dead." Focusing on Deadites (demons that inhabit bodies) that are unleashed by reading from a version of the Book of the Dead, the malleable premise spawned two direct sequels, a spinoff series, a 2013 reboot, video games, comic books and even a musical.

Although Cronin had helmed only one full-length feature — 2019's well-received "The Hole in the Ground" — the directors worked together on the Quibi anthology series "50 States of Fright," which led Raimi to encourage Cronin to pitch his take on the "Evil Dead" series. After developing the idea with Raimi collaborator Romel Adam, Cronin had what he calls his "Hollywood moment" in a brief pitch meeting.

Lily Sullivan as Beth in "Evil Dead Rise"

'Evil Dead' ex Mortis

Gonzo scenes from the series



THE EVIL DEAD
1981
Wildest moment:
As the Deadites die in the final scene, demonic hands burst from their bodies, spraying blood and guts.



EVIL DEAD II
1987
Wildest moment:
Ash uses a chain saw to carve into the decapitated head of his now-Deadite girlfriend, showing blood.



ARMY OF DARKNESS
1993
Wildest moment:
After a mini-Ash jumps down his throat, Ash chugs hot water as the mini-Ash in his stomach screams.



EVIL DEAD
2013
Wildest moment:
As blood rains from the sky, Mia bisects the entire body of a Deadite with a chain saw.



EVIL DEAD RISE
2023
Wildest moment:
Deadite Bridget uses a cheese grater to demolish the leg of Beth in an all-time gross-out scene.

OUR TOWN

JUST FOR VARIETY

by Marc Malkin



Michael Keaton may be reprising his role as Batman in the “The Flash,” but **Danny DeVito** says there’s no chance he’ll return as the Penguin in the DCU. “**Colin Farrell** is the Penguin now,” DeVito told me at the Breakthrough Prize gala. “He’s a brilliant actor. I love him. He’s a good friend. He’s a good man.”

“I loved seeing him as the Penguin. I thought he was great,” DeVito added before cracking, “He reminds me of a couple of my relatives back in Jersey.”

...

In his first comments since it was revealed that he and **Justin Britt-Gibson** are no longer writing the script for director **Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy’s** (1) “Star Wars” movie, **Damon Lindelof** (2) tells me the project was a “true labor of love.” “Peaky Blinders” creator **Steven Knight** is now penning the script. “The movie is still happening, but unfortunately not with me,” Lindelof said at the premiere of “Mrs. Davis,” the offbeat Peacock drama he is shepherding with showrunner **Tara Hernandez**. “I wish them all the best of luck. Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy is an incredible director, and I can’t wait to see what she comes up with.”

...

Lionel Richie (3) says he first met **King Charles** in the 1980s. “We’re about the same age,” the 73-year-old singer says. “I don’t want to say we grew up together, but we’ve been in and out of each other’s lives for a long time. So now to see him step into his rightful place, it’ll be very interesting to see what his reign will be.” It was announced last week that Richie will be among the artists to perform at the king’s coronation concert on May 7. “You’re told the palace is calling and you think, ‘Am I being punked?’” Richie says. “No, it was not that way at all. It was much more formal than that. And, of course, the answer was ‘Yes,’ no matter what else I may have had planned. This only happens once in a billion years, as far as I’m concerned.”

...

Ari Aster (4) is known for horror movies “Hereditary” and “Midsommar” and the new black comedy “Beau Is Afraid.” But he wouldn’t mind directing lighter fare. “I love rom-coms,” he tells me. His favorite? **Albert Brooks’** 1991 “Defending Your Life”: “It’s great. It’s the best.” Aster hasn’t started writing a rom-com ... yet. “Give me a few years,” he says.

...

Get to know **Young Mazino** (5). The Maryland native plays Paul on Netflix’s “Beef.” The actor reveals that his father wasn’t exactly thrilled when he told him he was dropping out of college to pursue acting. “I just remember the way he put his spoon down and just looked at me,” Mazino tells me. “There was some friction over the years when I was struggling to make it in New York. I had some bitterness and resentment — which was so foolish of me — because we couldn’t see eye to eye. I couldn’t come to terms with the fact that he just wanted me to be safe and stable.” His father, a cybersecurity and computer systems expert who has several master’s degrees and a Ph.D., called him after watching “Beef.” “He is a man of few words, but he said, ‘You’re a good actor,’” Mazino recalls, smiling. “That was a really cool thing.”

(1)



(2)



(3)



(4)



(5)



EXPOSURE

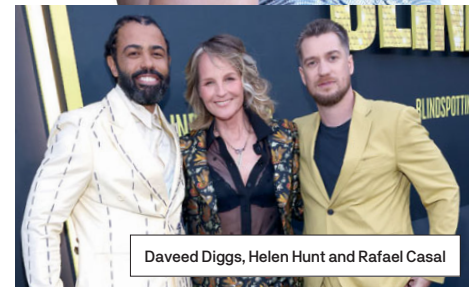
Edited by Marc Malkin



DESERT NIGHT: **Bad Bunny** performs at the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival on April 14 in Indio, Calif.



Jasmine Cephas Jones



Daveed Diggs, Helen Hunt and Rafael Casal

April 13

'The Last Thing He Told Me' Premiere

Regency Village Theatre, Westwood



Reese Witherspoon

Julia Roberts was originally set to star in Hello Sunshine's adaptation of Laura Dave's novel. But when she left the project, Jennifer Garner reached out to the author about replacing the Oscar winner. "I wrote letters advocating for myself and talking about what the book meant to me and what the role meant, what I saw in the role and the ways that I felt," Garner told *Variety*. She added, "I had to just do anything in my power to plead my case."

Jennifer Garner, Nikolaj Coster-Waldau and Dane DiLiegro



April 11

'Blindspotting' Premiere

NeueHouse Hollywood

It was a competition of bejeweled smiles as stars **Jasmine Cephas Jones** and **Benjamin Earl Turner** showed off their custom grills at the Season 2 celebration. Cephas Jones donned the sparkling silver bottom fang set she wore for the show's promotional pics, while Turner sported a creative outlined silver bottom set with an opal addition. The accessories served as an homage to Bay Area culture and to Oakland, where the show is set. "I think there's something really special about Oakland," said Cephas Jones. "It's like the Brooklyn of the West Coast."

April 11

'Rennervations' Premiere

Regency Village Theatre, Westwood

Jeremy Renner walked his first red carpet since his near-fatal snow plow accident in January. The "Avengers" actor told *Variety* that he insisted Disney+ not postpone the premiere, though he was still recovering from his injuries. "I look a little beat up right now, but I promise you this show is what's propelling me to get better and makes me want to get better every day," said Renner, who was joined at the event by his family, including 10-year-old daughter **Ava**. "I set out a goal to be walking this carpet. And here I am enjoying it." Upon entering the theater for a post-screening Q&A moderated by **Jimmy Kimmel**, Renner received a standing ovation.

Rachael Leigh Cook with children Theodore Vigo Sullivan, Gillies and Charlotte Easton Gillies



Disney's Bob Iger with Jeremy Renner



Rory Millikin with daughter London Millikin



Brittany Perrineau and Harold Perrineau



EXPOSURE



Lin-Manuel Miranda

April 13

'A Black Lady Sketch Show' FYC Event

Linwood Dunn Theater, Hollywood

Robin Thede is known for bringing the funny, but the creator and star of "A Black Lady Sketch Show" got emotional when discussing a recent encounter with her idol **Whoopi Goldberg**. "She said, 'You've created many seasons of all-Black women writers' rooms. There's not even all-white women writers' rooms — like that's crazy,'" Thede recalled, sitting alongside her co-stars **Gabrielle Dennis** and **Skye Townsend** and Emmy-winning director **Bridget Stokes** during the post-screening panel. "I didn't even think about it like that. I just thought I want us to tell these stories because we don't get the chance to." As Thede choked up, Dennis underlined the creator's impact: "This show is an institution that she's created for history-making opportunities both in front of and behind the camera."



DaMya Gurley, Tamara Jade, Skye Townsend, Robin Thede, Gabrielle Dennis and Angel Laketa Moore

April 16

'The Phantom of the Opera' Closing Performance

Majestic Theatre, New York

Broadway's longest-running show dropped its iconic chandelier one last time after 35 years on the Great White Way. "The one question I keep getting asked again and again — will the Phantom return?" producer **Cameron Mackintosh** said during the curtain call. "Having been a producer for over 55 years, I've seen all the great musicals return, and 'Phantom' is one of the greatest. So it's only a matter of time." **Andrew Lloyd Webber**, with the show's original Christine, **Sarah Brightman**, standing beside him, dedicated the evening to his late son Nicholas, who died March 25 from gastric cancer: "As Sarah knows, when he was a little boy, he heard some of this music." Brightman added, "When Andrew was writing it, he was right there. So his soul is with us. Nick, we love you very much."



Sarah Brightman and Andrew Lloyd Webber

April 15

Breakthrough Prize Ceremony

Academy Museum, Los Angeles

The annual gala celebrates scientists, with more than \$15 million being awarded in the fields of life sciences, fundamental physics and mathematics. "I thought it was important to be here," "Succession" star **Jeremy Strong** told *Variety*. "As a society, as a culture, we normally pedestal-ize actors and people in Hollywood, but I've never been on a carpet to support the work of physicists, biochemists, biologists and mathematicians. We're all here because of some of these people's work. Two of the honorees developed mRNA vaccine technology. We'd all be sheltering in place if it wasn't for them. So I'm just happy to be here to support and shine a light on these remarkable people."



Gal Gadot



Jeremy Strong



Charlie McDowell and Lily Collins



Cameron Mackintosh



Gayle King



John Riddle, Laird Mackintosh and Emilie Kouatchou



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Elementary'
has made
Janelle James
into TV's
brightest
breakout star,
and she's just
getting started

■
Story by
Emily
Longeretta

■
P 22

■
Photographs
by JD Barnes



■

If you Google Janelle James, the first thing that comes up is that she got her big break from Chris Rock. Wrong!

Rock did hire her as a comedian on his 2017 “Total Blackout Tour,” but James says that’s as far as it goes. “He’s done a lot,” she says, carefully choosing words to describe someone who is credited too frequently for her rise. “He’s done enough for me. He didn’t make my career or anything.” She adds, “I was never close with Chris Rock. We went on tour together, and then I didn’t speak to him after that.”

And of course, she followed what happened to him at the Oscars, but hasn’t watched his Netflix special. She doesn’t want to be cornered into talking about him or the slap in interviews like this one. “I want to truthfully be like, ‘I ain’t seen it. No opinion!’ I don’t want to be involved.”

James has more important things to talk about on this day. She’s become a hot commodity in the industry with her Emmy-nominated breakout role on “Abbott Elementary,” the hottest sitcom on network TV. Her inept Principal Ava Coleman makes an average of 3.3 million viewers a week laugh on the mockumentary show created by and starring Quinta Brunson. The ABC series, which debuted in December 2021, has landed every award in town — from the Emmys to the Golden Globes — and it’s made the entire cast (from Sheryl Lee Ralph to Lisa Ann Walter to Tyler James Williams) sitcom famous.

In Season 2, James’ story arc has only expanded, making her character a fan favorite, despite being selfish and rude. “It’s not easy to play an unlikable character and still win the audience over,” says Brunson. “In the first season, there were a lot of people who weren’t on board with Ava, but her performance brought people in.”

James’ wit and timing comes from self-taught training as a writer. She’s worked in the writers’ rooms of “The Rundown With Robin Thede” and “Black Monday” and pens her own material for her current tour, “Newly Famous.” She also wrote

for Hulu’s “History of the World: Part II,” participating in that gig over Zoom.

It’s been quite the happy adjustment for James, who five years ago was living in the backroom of a bike shop. Now, her face is on the side of buses and on billboards — something that still surprises her. She has executives gushing over her, which also feels like an out-of-body experience. Warner Bros. TV chairman Channing Dungey says, “She expertly walks the tightrope between hilarity and incompetence, delivering each line with precision and wit.” And Disney TV Group president Craig Erwich enthuses, “She continues to show the world that her talent knows no bounds. It has been incredible to witness her star power rise.”

James prefers her privacy, which is why she’s meeting me for breakfast at the Four Seasons Hotel in Beverly Hills. In her words, “Truly wealthy people don’t watch TV.” Plus, she has a new disguise: While on hiatus, she’s been able to take a break from Principal Ava’s many wigs and for the first time has shaved her head.

But there’s something else that goes unsaid. “Abbott Elementary” is a Black show created by a Black showrunner that’s penetrated the cultural discourse. Remarkably, this is still a rare thing in 2023. Looking ahead to the Emmys, many are predicting that “Abbott” will sweep the comedy categories. But it probably won’t be competing against too many other Black shows. “Atlanta” is ending, and the other comedy front-runners are expected to be “Ted Lasso” and “Only Murders in the Building” — shows that don’t feature prominent roles for Black actors. Not only is the cast of “Abbott” diverse, but the 10-person writers’ room is too — something that’s crucial to the show’s success.

“It makes things more natural to have people who get how a Black woman would speak,” says James. “You have to know a person like Ava to be able to write for her. And if they don’t know someone like her — because we do have white writers — it’s good to have a Black person in charge, so when I say, ‘Ava would never say this,’ I’m listened to.” She adds, “There’s some places where it will be a white person telling you that they can write for Black people better than you can. That’s wild! But the diversity of our writers’ room gives the show its authenticity, and we come off as real people.”



■ **James, who declines** to disclose her age, isn't first-name famous like Oprah or Denzel. But she also doesn't seem to be seeking that out. She's spent her whole life putting her craft and her skills ahead of her affable, contagiously warm personality. The few biographical details that she volunteers are, indeed, things you can find on Google about her: She lives in Los Angeles and grew up on St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands. Starting at age 7, she worked on her dad's food truck, running up and down the beach to sell Coronas to the fancy tourists on vacation. She has two sons — one who is 20, the other whose age she's not revealing. She doesn't see the point of sharing that.

"I'm grown. I have a 20-year-old son. I'm not ashamed of my age or anything like that. But for women — and everybody knows it and acts like they don't — it gives an idea of what you are in people's heads," she says.

As soon as people in the industry learn that James is a mother of two, they assume she's a "mom comic." "That's not my jam," she says. "People have this idea of motherhood, the same way they have an idea of women as we reach a certain age. Each age group, people have an idea in your head of what it is. I don't want that to prevent me from doing anything, because I can do everything."

James has always had that mentality. During high school, she moved to Maryland with her mom, then headed to New York City's Fashion Institute of Technology — she'd watched "Project Runway" and thought it looked fun. But it wasn't so fabulous. "Everyone who seemed to be going on to better things was already in the business, their parents were in the business, or they already had money. I was broke as hell."

She kept taking odd jobs. She started a company called the Joy of Not Cooking, delivering food to startups; she worked as a humidor, carrying a case of cigars at Scores strip club; she helped organize parties for designers at a fashion PR firm. "I was just making money," she shrugs. "That's what New York was about."

But she wasn't making much. In fact, she lied to her mom and said she had an apartment when she went to college. "I was crashing with this dude and then other people I met. It was very dangerous," James says. The people she stayed with included a couple she met in high school while standing in line for 12 hours for MTV's "Wanna Be a VJ." "It was freezing out, but in that line, I made



■ James playing Ava Coleman on "Abbott Elementary"

so many friends," she says. "I'm still friends with some of them now."

Eventually, James left FIT. She fell in love, got married and started a family. Her then-husband — a teacher — got into school in the Midwest, so the family moved to Champaign, Ill. While there, she put all her focus on raising her sons. "I was kind of floating in space, not knowing what I was doing with myself. I had left all my friends," she says. "My relationship fell apart there."

While grocery shopping one day, she was handed a flyer for an open mic night. Out of boredom, she went and sat in the audience. "It was all these white boys doing their 10 minutes, and I was having a good time," she says.

They loved her laugh and energy, so they invited her back. "The Midwest was new for me," she says. "White people were new for me. Seeing white boys and talking to them like that, it was a new experience for me. And I love new experiences."

She didn't know what these men meant when they eventually offered her "time." When they explained she could have four minutes on the mic with her own material, she got right to work on writing. "I remember the first laugh I got. In my head, I was like, 'Oh, this is it. This is what I'm doing now,'" James recalls. "I was in it then."

With that, she started meeting comedians, spending every weekend at her home base, Jukebox Comedy Club in Peoria, Ill., where she was

"a big fish in a small pond." Famous comedians passed through, and eventually she met Todd Barry, which led to getting to know comedians in the alt scene, including Eugene Mirman, Jenny Slate and Kumail Nanjiani.

But she wasn't making a consistent enough salary to move full time to New York, so she went back and forth for three years. Luckily, those interpersonal skills paid off — she had a friend who owned that bike shop, where she slept four nights a week. "There was an air mattress and a rat. I would wake up and get out before the store opened. I'd just walk around all day with my stuff until I did shows and then I'd go back to sleep," James says.

Then she received the call from Rock. That (and her first real paycheck) led to her first writing job on "The Rundown With Robin Thede." After one season, she landed a staff writer job on Showtime's 2019 comedy series "Black Monday," which starred Don Cheadle as an '80s stockbroker. Then, in 2020, she was sent a script for a new sitcom.

"Abbott Elementary" made her laugh out loud. It also made her feel. Brunson's pilot, which

focused on teachers at a Philadelphia public school, was good. Despite the fact that James wasn't looking for acting work and didn't like auditioning, her agents convinced her to send in a self-tape. It was one of two she sent that entire year.

Afterward, she went on Twitter to DM Brunson, whom she'd met once. Brunson knew her as a comedian but not an actor, and was excited to see the tape. In less than a minute, Brunson knew she'd found her Ava. "It was just perfect. It was just exactly what I was looking for," Brunson recalls. "You couldn't get me off the Janelle train. Once I saw her, it was case closed."

The lack of acting experience didn't matter, Brunson says, because James understood how both terrible and loving Ava could be. And James could see herself as Ava — especially because the character description didn't include a specific word she was continuously seeing in scripts: "sexy."

"If I see it, I'm like, 'Fuck, I have to diet for this? I don't want to do that.' That turns me off. And I don't want to maintain that," she says.

During our conversation, we order breakfast — and we don't hesitate to pile up our table with carbs. "I'll only diet for a Marvel movie," James declares. "I will give up bacon and waffles to be Storm."

She's not kidding: She'd love to play the "X-Men" character, so much so that the "Abbott" writers dressed Ava up as Storm for the Halloween episode. She's determined to manifest landing that role — and until then, she won't be dieting. She lost about 15 pounds between seasons 1 and 2 of "Abbott," simply because the first season was filmed right after quarantine, when she'd been "eating Cheez-Its for the whole year."

"Now I'm seeing all these people like, 'Oh, Janelle is hot!' So now I've gotta maintain that! I really do. I was like, I should have never lost this weight. Now that's what people expect from me," she says. "I just want to be funny and do things! Being hot is work — that's another job."

She's found a healthy way to stay in shape now. In the middle of the night, she runs on a treadmill and screams — yes, she really does. She doesn't want to ever starve herself. "That's not fun. My body would be like, 'What the fuck are you doing?' Not because I'm against being hot; I just know myself, and that won't make me happy."

■ **Confidence radiates off** James in any environment — and that didn't just come with the fame of "Abbott." It's been there for decades. She can't pinpoint where it comes from but knows its importance.

"There're so many men walking around with confidence that's unearned. If women do the same, they're monsters," she says. "I'm confident in my abilities, confident that I'm funnier than most people. That's not even my ego, that's years in the game. I did the work, have the respect of others. And not only others, but men. Once a man says you're funny, that's all it takes — which sucks. But you need the respect of men because they are who're at the top of this profession. You need that co-sign. So nobody can take that away from me. All I have in this shit is respect and admiration for people who've done it already."

She's dealt with sexual harassment and verbal insults throughout her stand-up career but has always taken it in stride — and she won't get into specifics. "I just keep moving, like most women."

Plus, comedians have been looked at more closely in the past few years as the world continues to change. Dave Chappelle, whom she admired when growing up, recently made headlines for offensive jokes about transgender people. But that's not the only reason she prefers old Chappelle to new.

"The last thing I watched of his was when he came out with all the specials at once. Regardless of what he said, I thought it was boring. I like silly Chappelle. He's in his wisdom bag now," she says. "We're clowns! Once we forget that we're clowns, then it becomes bad. Your objective is to make people laugh and then sneak your thoughts in underneath the jokes. If your thoughts are on top, that's not funny or entertaining to me."

■ **"When people say, 'You're just like your character,' that's an insult. I'm doing a lot of work to bring this bitch to life."**

JANELLE JAMES

This year, James added "host" to her résumé. She took a gig emceeing the WGA Awards solely to schmooze with Mike White. Like many, she'd love to be a part of "The White Lotus" in the future. "I want people to see me outside of the character of Ava. I am not Ava; I am acting. I'm not ashamed to be Ava, but when people say, 'You're just like your character,' that's an insult," she says. "I'm doing a lot of work to bring this bitch to life."

She's doing so much work, that she's turned down some big offers (none of which she'll reveal in case she wants to circle back). "I turn down so much shit. I could be so much richer than I am right now," she says. "I only do what I want."

Now, two seasons into "Abbott Elementary," she still doesn't consider herself wealthy. But, she proudly notes, she has a great credit score and is debt-free. "I bought my mom an expensive blender, not a house," she says of her success. "A plus of coming into money later in life outside my 20s is I'm not a dumbass with it."

When "Abbott" was picked up for a second season and James had to move to Los Angeles permanently, she realized she needed to buy a new car. She planned on a top-of-the-line Mazda until co-star Tyler James Williams chimed in. "Tyler was like, 'No, bitch. You cannot pull up Season 2 in a Mazda,'" she says. He took her to a few high-end dealerships, and she settled on a BMW. It's the vehicle she arrives in — not flashy at all, but flashier than a Mazda.

Other than that, she spends her money on comfort — nice sheets, a cozy bathrobe and a good massage. Mostly, she enjoys the only free entertainment in life: laughing and sex. "What else do you have that don't cost nothing?"

James knows that in this industry, things could change in a minute. She also knows "Abbott Elementary" won't last for an eternity — and shouldn't. "Quinta has mad shit to do. She's not gonna want this to go forever. That's what I'm hoping," she says. "I don't know what ABC wants, but I'm confident that she is smart enough and prolific enough that she's going to want to do other projects."

If the network did want "Abbott" to continue for many more seasons, James could see a scenario where the staff of the school would change. Maybe Ava gets fired? "I think that'd be better than a redemption arc where she becomes a good person all of a sudden," she says. "That's when I quit." ●

NIGHT SHIFT

**An exodus of talent —
from James Corden to
Trevor Noah — and the
streaming revolution
has led to hard times for
late-night talk shows**

By
BRIAN STEINBERG

Illustration by **ROBERT RISKO**



Maddie Luke doesn't work in television but can tell you quickly why TV's late-night sector is showing signs of struggle.

The 26-year-old, who works at the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx, doesn't have a cable subscription and so can't watch any late-night programs in their entirety. Instead, she says, "I just follow the socials. When it comes to TV, I don't mind watching a guest that I'm interested in, but sometimes I'm not interested in what's next."

Megha Kakaraparti, a 26-year-old product manager from Leesburg, Va., sketches out another scenario. She uses her late-night hours to catch up on her favorite crime procedurals. When she does take notice of a late-night show, "it's just clips on TikTok or YouTube or just something I see on Instagram that's trending," she says.

The attitudes expressed by these two young women — part of the target audience for most late-night shows — shed light on the dilemma vexing this highly specialized genre of variety series. There's still a ton of interest in the personalities and the humor of late night, but not so many people are watching full programs live. And that amounts to a growing crisis for NBC, CBS, ABC and others, because they rake in the most advertising money from those viewers who enjoy a regular check-in with Stephen Colbert, Jimmy Fallon, Jimmy Kimmel and their brethren.

In 2018, seven late-night programs — NBC's "Tonight" and "Late Night"; CBS' "Late Show" and "Late Late Show"; ABC's "Jimmy Kimmel Live"; Comedy Central's "Daily Show" and NBC's "Saturday Night Live" — drew more than \$698 million in advertising, according to ad-spending tracker Vivvix. By 2022, that total came to \$412.7 million — a drop of approximately 41% over five years.

So challenges abound. After David Letterman retired in 2015, networks ranging from MTV to National Geographic Channel tried their hand at late night. Weekly programs such as John Oliver and Samantha Bee debuted around that time. But instead of aiming for mass crowds, the programs cultivated niche audiences. During Trump's presidency, some of the shows became more political, cutting off their ability to draw bigger crowds. With TV economics floundering, those shows have been left with a smaller base. (TBS canceled "Full Frontal With Samantha Bee" in July.)

If there's a next generation of late-night hosts to be found on streaming, they have yet to be located. Netflix and other platforms that serve up content have not been able to find a topical show that replicates the daily habit — and it's not for lack of trying. Still, one newer entrant into the late-night arena that can't be denied is Fox News Channel with "Gutfeld!" a nightly 11 p.m. program built around commentator Greg Gutfeld and a panel of contributors who chop it up about politics and culture. In the first quarter of this year, "Gutfeld!" drew more viewers than NBC's "The Tonight Show" or ABC's "Jimmy Kimmel Live."



Jimmy Kimmel recently signed another three-year deal at ABC, but executives at rival companies wonder if he'll stay after his contract is up.

The shift in how and when people watch late night is forcing a shake-out of talent and a reckoning on the business side of the ledger. Some hosts have left or are leaving the building — notably Trevor Noah after eight years at "The Daily Show," and James Corden, who's soon to step down from CBS' "The Late Late Show" — while others are facing budget tightening. The days of a David Letterman earning as much as \$30 million a year, as he did during the peak of his CBS run from 1993 to 2015, are long gone.

"Five years from now, it will probably be the same," predicts Mark Lazarus, chairman of NBCU Television and Streaming, speaking of the way late-night shows are currently slotted and distributed. "Ten years from now, all bets are off."

Less than a decade ago, there was no hotter daypart in television than late night, with new faces ranging from Noah to Desus & Mero barreling into the arena. Many a blue-chip advertiser was happy to have its spots in shows featuring topical jokes served up by pop culture touchstones — just the surnames Colbert, Fallon and Kimmel invoke a particular brand of jocular, poke-fun-at-the-headlines comedy that Johnny Carson enshrined as the nightly TV tuck-in for millions of Americans.

In truth, how much of late night people were consuming the next morning via DVRs and YouTube clips has been a concern for more than a decade. But the wildfire spread of video via social media platforms has made it even harder for the networks who pay the bills to bring the bucks — especially the old-guard broadcast networks.

As money gets tighter, executives worry more about costs. The move from watching TV programs on a specific night and at a specific time to binge-viewing a favorite on a streaming hub at moments of one's own choosing has destabilized the TV economy, and Wall Street has put pressure on media giants to show profits as well as digital growth. Media CEOs now have "this intense focus on cost management and cash flow generation," says John Harrison, who leads media and entertainment analysis for EY. "There's just such an appetite today to look at old standbys, whether it's programming or even assessing entire dayparts, and saying, 'Does this meet our needs over the near term? Ultimately, does it help or hurt our transition to streaming?' Some of the late-evening and late-night dayparts could get caught up in that."

In fact, they already have. NBC used to carry three Monday-Friday late-night programs: "The Tonight Show," "Late

Night” and the 1:30 a.m. half-hour that was established in 1988 as “Later With Bob Costas.” Greg Kinnear and Carson Daly kept that slot going for another 25 years. But NBC cut the show in June 2021 after the most recent host, YouTube influencer Lilly Singh, failed to gain traction.

Comedy Central’s portfolio of late-night shows has also been cut from three to one — and that one, “Daily Show,” has yet to replace Trevor Noah, who left the desk in December. After James Corden ends his run on CBS’ “The Late Late Show” in the next few days, CBS will cancel the program, even though it has been a fixture on its schedule since 1995. In its place, the network is expected to air a revival of the Comedy Central game show “@midnight,” which will cost significantly less than Corden’s highly produced show that included signature bits like “Carpool Karaoke.”

“I do think the late-night daypart is really critical to the broadcast platform. I think you have iconic franchises in ‘The Late Show,’ ‘Tonight Show,’ ‘Kimmel.’ I think there is genuine interest in maintaining that space,” says George Cheeks, president and CEO of CBS. “All the broadcast networks in that space have to be really thoughtful about what we spend, how we spend and how we invest. You can’t be locked into some of the legacy elements of the format.”

Comedy Central may still rebuild “The Daily Show” around a central personality starting in the fall. The show has been test-driving guest hosts since January. “We were incredibly impressed and, frankly, thrilled with the guest hosts,” says Chris McCarthy, president and CEO of Paramount Media Networks. “Each one has brought something unique over many of these weeks. We’ve had some weeks

with higher viewing than we did at this time last year, so there’s always room for growth.” McCarthy adds that the guest hosts will continue “until around the end of April, and then in spring, we will finalize our choice.” Use of guest hosts and contributors could still be on the table.

While streamers are likely candidates to serve up the next generation of late night, they have failed so far. Netflix, in recent years, has struck out with shows hosted by Michelle Wolf, Joel McHale, Hasan Minhaj and most recently Chelsea Handler. Hulu canceled a weekly entry hosted by Sarah Silverman. Apple TV+ runs a program featuring the venerable Jon Stewart, but buzz around it has been minimal — the result of trying to run a series of this sort without the benefit of a big network to promote the show at other times of day. NBCU’s Peacock has carried “The Amber Ruffin Show,” hosted by the former head writer of “Late Night With Seth Meyers,” but Ruffin’s weekly late-night entry is producing fewer episodes as the multi-hyphenate works on a pilot for NBC.

No one is sending Stephen Colbert to the sidelines, not tonight, and probably not next year. Fallon, Kimmel and their cohorts continue to lure a decent audience each evening, and their monologues, sketches, pranks and interviews turn up all over the digi-sphere within minutes of being broadcast — sometimes even in advance.

But change, in a fundamental way, is inevitable over the long term, say veterans of the late-night wars of the mid-1990s and early aughts when Letterman and Jay Leno skirmished over guest bookings and comedy street cred.

“You’re dealing with some heavy legacy costs and infrastructure: staff, studio crew, hosts. In a time of diminishing audiences, it’s tough to make that math add

up,” says Jim Bell, a former showrunner at NBC’s “Tonight” and executive producer of “Today” who is now head of strategy for NewsBreak, a local news and information platform. “You can hope that things like social media — Instagram, YouTube — might be complementary, but it just now feels like it’s cannibalizing.”

It’s also telling that CBS’ Colbert, NBC’s Fallon and ABC’s Kimmel are all staying busy producing other shows for their home networks.

The networks don’t want to give up. “It’s an important part of the dialogue and culture,” says Jen Flanz, executive producer of “The Daily Show,” which observers note is likely reducing expenses by relying on guests to lead the program. Not every country allows TV personalities to poke fun at the government or influentials, she adds. “I think it’s important to appreciate the platform that late-night hosts have.”

Moreover, the job of fronting a show is still highly coveted. Comedian Kal Penn, who recently completed a week-long stint as a “Daily Show” guest host, would be eager to take the job full time. “The first time I remember watching, I was 18 or 19,” he says. “So this was a real dream come true.”

At ABC, Jimmy Kimmel recently signed another three-year deal, but executives at rival media companies wonder whether the host, who is the longest serving, might choose to step down after his contract is up. With Kimmel involved in the Oscars and producing other specials, “you can’t put a price on what Jimmy means to Walt Disney Co. as well as late night,” says Rob Mills, executive vice president of unscripted and alternative entertainment at Walt Disney Television, who adds: “I don’t think he’s going to stay for another 40 years, but I certainly am praying he’s going to stay beyond these three.”

NBCUniversal has been working aggressively to shore up its large portfolio of late-night fare, including the institution that is “Saturday Night Live.” And even bigger changes could be coming: It’s no secret NBCU is considering the possibility of dropping its 10 p.m. hour of programming. “We would obviously think about how that affects late night and maybe run late night a little earlier if that became the case,” says NBCU’s Lazarus. “We have made no determination. We will evaluate it a year from now.” ●

“You’re dealing with some heavy legacy costs. In a time of diminishing audiences, it’s tough to make that math add up. You can hope that things like social media might be complementary, but it now feels like it’s cannibalizing.”

JIM BELL



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Power of Law 2023



Variety recognizes top showbiz legal eagles on our Impact List, while our Power of Law honoree, Craig Emanuel, is saluted for his philanthropy.

VARIETY

Clashing Celebs Avoid Spotlight of Litigation



Mediation offers an alternative to nasty public disputes that can sink reputations and take a psychic toll

By Todd Longwell

Illustration by
Bratislav Milenkovic

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For every publicly visible and contentious Johnny Depp vs. Amber Heard trial, there are dozens more that never see the light of day. More often than not, a showbiz lawsuit that begins with the plaintiff and defendant slinging accusations back and forth in the headlines ends quietly with a below-the-fold story announcing that a confidential settlement has been reached. Yet, for those players who haven't been through the process, what goes on behind the scenes remains something of a mystery. Such settlements are often achieved through third-party mediation, which, unlike arbitration, never mandates a binding decision. According to a survey of judges and attorneys published by the American Bar Assn. in December 2020, mediation is the fairest way to resolve civil cases, followed by jury trials, bench trials and, lastly, arbitration. It's also increasingly common. The mediation process "is like shuttle diplomacy," says Cheryl Snow, a partner at Gang, Tyre, Ramer, Brown & Passman. "They go from party to party and say, 'well, maybe if you give a little bit here,' and kind of coax the parties into an agreement." The leading player in these real-life dramas — and, ironically, the least well-known — is the person serving as the mediator, commonly referred to as a "neutral." Although the Los Angeles Superior Court offers free mediation services for individuals and businesses, the high-stakes disputes that make the news are virtually all handled by private mediators supplied by companies such as Signature Resolution, JAMS, Alternative Resolution Centers, Barron's ADR Services and Judicate West.

Signature Resolution founding partner Dario Higuchi notes that experience counts in the mediation business.

“Through mediation, the lawyer can make the determination of how the case resolves, and so can the client.”

— Dennis Ellis



Traditionally, the mediator role has been filled by retired judges and attorneys, but that is changing.

"Younger people have jumped into this industry, but you still need some gray hair to do this job," says Dario Higuchi, founding partner and managing member of Signature Resolution. "It's difficult for someone that's not very experienced, who hasn't lived through hundreds of cases, to be able to be convincing to a client and a lawyer."

While attorneys are fierce advocates for their clients, and judges preside over their courtrooms with godlike powers, mediators are more like priests or rabbis who nudge litigants towards a mutually acceptable resolution, often by noting the metaphorical plagues that await them if they fail to settle.

"Everybody takes some incredible risk when they allow the case to go to trial," says Dennis Ellis, a partner at Ellis George Cipollone O'Brien Annaguy. "Through mediation, the lawyer can make the determination of how the case resolves, and so can the client."

For mediators working entertainment-related cases, the task is complicated by the fact that the litigants are accustomed to being treated like gods themselves.

"You have very strong personalities, whether they're at the executive level or the talent level, so you're dealing with people who commonly dominate the scene and the room, and they have to be convinced that their celebrity is not necessarily going to be a factor in a court setting," says Louis Meisinger of Signature, who spent more than 40 years as a litigator working in private practice, and as a general counsel for Disney, before a five-year stint as a Los Angeles Superior Court judge.

At the same time, the litigants need to be confident that the mediator is an agreeable and effective choice for both parties.

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Signature Resolution is an official partner of Variety's Power of Law Breakfast and would like to congratulate all lawyers honored in Variety's 2023 Legal Impact Report, and Craig Emanuel, this year's Power of Law Award honoree.

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"You really want somebody that you think is going to be receptive to your case, but you also want somebody that the other side is going to listen to," says Devin McRae, a partner in the firm Early Sullivan Wright Gizer & McRae. "But it also depends on the case. If you're defending against what you feel is a shakedown, you're going to want somebody that's going to recognize a shakedown for what it is, or at least recognize when there's merit and when there's not."

Private third-party mediation isn't cheap. On the low end of the scale, California Arbitration & Mediation Services (CAMS) charges a minimum of \$1,800 for one of its neutrals to mediate a civil case. The fee covers a half-hour of prep time and the first four hours of mediation, with \$450 charged for each subsequent hour. Mediators who handle big entertainment cases can charge anywhere between \$15,000 and \$35,000 a day.

For the neutrals, it's more than about getting a big payday. Although most are effectively employed full-time, they are free to work when they please and take on only cases that interest them. It also gives them the luxury of time to do deep dives into a case's complexities.

"With that clock ticking behind you on the bench all the time, you don't necessarily have that [time] as a judge," observes Scott Gordon, a Signature neutral who worked as a police officer before launching a legal career that included a stint as a deputy for Los Angeles County and 17 years as a Los Angeles Superior Court judge.

While pricey, mediation is still a bargain when compared to the legal fees that can be incurred by a trial and subsequent appeals, which can stretch out for years. And the cost is not only monetary. A lengthy, public legal dispute can also cause reputational harm and exact an incalculable psychic toll.

"Even a straight commercial dispute can be very taxing on either litigant," says Meisinger. "Many times, a company's future is at risk. Even if it's not, it's still disruptive and invasive. And when you get into family law cases, the emotional cost is enormous."

The vagaries of showbiz careers can present special challenges for mediators. When splitting assets and determining child support, it can be difficult to estimate future income from film and TV profit participation and music royalties, and custody is often complicated by swings in employment status, which can keep a parent at home for six months, then take them to a foreign country for an extended period.

You really want somebody that you think is going to be receptive to your case, but you also want somebody that the other side is going to listen to."

Devin McRae

"Sometimes people in matrimonial actions just need to be heard, even if what they're saying doesn't have a tremendous amount of legal weight, so to speak," says Brett Ward, a partner at law firm Blank Rome, who specializes in matrimonial law, and who also works as a mediator. "And once they've told their side of the story to someone who has a sympathetic ear, then the person in my shoes says, 'OK, now here's how I would apply the law to that.'"

Neutrals also have needs, and chief among them is getting litigants' legal briefs and arguing their cases in a timely manner. Preferably, briefs are delivered a week in advance, but it's not unusual for them to arrive in the early morning hours before the mediation conference.

"We all joke that when you come in in the morning, you listen to your clerk hit that date stamp [on the briefs] because people are filing things late," says Gordon. "But, by and large, they are good about getting in early. Also, we have the flexibility to move the date to give you more time."

On the day of the mediation, the plaintiffs and the defendants are sequestered in different rooms, from two to as many as seven or eight, depending on the number of parties involved in the case.

"I usually spend the first hour or two talking about principles that apply to litigation in general and then to the fact and the law of a particular case — so in my case, it's generally a couple of hours before I get the first demand from the plaintiff," says Meisinger. "And then from that point, you negotiate with the parties. You're trying to move the settlement needle toward some place in common ground. Notice I didn't say the midpoint."

The offices of the firm providing the neutrals have traditionally served as the host, but during the pandemic, restrictions mandated that mediations be done remotely via teleconferencing services such as Zoom, and, while those restrictions have since lifted, remote mediation has remained a popular alternative to in-person meetings.

"In some ways, when people are doing this from their home or an office, they feel more secure emotionally as opposed to being in a third-party place," says Gordon. "I find it a very effective tool. The camera sees everything, so you're going to see it."

Neutrals who handle showbiz-related cases typically have backgrounds in entertainment law or have worked in communities that bring them into frequent social contact with industry players. Although they have no legal obligation to disclose a potential conflict of interest, they usually do so anyway.

"The lawyers are pretty great about not caring," says retired Los Angeles Superior Court judge Diane Wayne, a JAMS neutral.

Ultimately, the nonbinding nature of mediation is both its most attractive feature and its most vexing bug. The process can stretch over multiple sessions spanning months, and still never reach a resolution.

"Sometimes cases are just not ripe for settlement," says Meisinger. "But I think good mediators ultimately have a very high success rate. That's why people pay a lot of money to engage in this process." 



Louis Meisinger of Signature spent more than 40 years as a litigator.

Congratulations to our Media and Entertainment team



Tom Ara

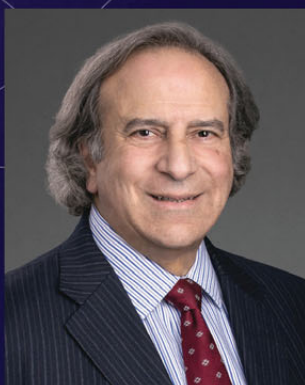


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Congratulations to the one and only Craig Emanuel – an exceptionally talented lawyer, a generous and gracious mentor, partner and friend, and someone who is forever passionate about society and justice

2023 Power of Law Honoree



Craig Emanuel

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**Power of Law
Honoree
Craig Emanuel
rose from
fledgling
law student
to attorney
extraordinaire**

By Malina Saval

Photographs by Adam Amengual

Entertainment attorney Craig Emanuel, *Variety*'s 2023 Power of Law honoree, remembers the day he got a phone call asking if he would be interested in meeting with Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson.

"I knew that they were meeting with a lot of lawyers around town, and I really didn't think we were going to get selected," says Emanuel. "A lot of the other law firms were boutique entertainment firms that had huge client lists."

"Months went by, and I thought, you know, nothing's happening," Emanuel continues. "And then Richard Lovett, president of CAA, who reps Tom and Rita, called me one evening on the phone. I was at dinner with my partners, and Richard said, 'I've got some good news, you have a new client.'"

Now sitting in the brightly lit expanse of Paul Hastings' soaring Century City offices, where Emanuel heads up the renowned global law firm's entertainment and media division, it's clear he's being humble, underselling his reputation as top-tier Hollywood counsel. In addition to Hanks and his production shingle Playtone, Emanuel, who recently marked his fifth year as partner at Paul Hastings, boasts a heady clientele: super-showrunner Ryan Murphy, filmmaker Robert Rodriguez, MSG Entertainment, writer-producer Tony Gilroy, Mandalay Pictures, Cirque du Soleil and fellow Aussie Paul Hogan — to name just a few.

"I think sometimes attorneys go in and pitch themselves — not about what they do, but what their competitors don't do. I think that's a mistake," notes Emanuel. "I think you have to lead from strength as to who you are."

An unassailable sense of self has long shaped Emanuel's professional and personal sojourn, starting with his first day of school in America.

It was September 1972 and the Australian 13-year-old, fresh off his bar mitzvah that June, had moved with his family from Melbourne to Rumson, N.J., where his father, a corporate transactional attorney, was launching an international real estate and investment company.

"I rode my bicycle to school, and I had a bike that was made by an Australian company called Moulton," remembers Emanuel of



Emanuel, Rep. Terri Sewell and Rev. Jesse Jackson on a walking tour of Selma, Ala.



Emanuel with his client Ryan Murphy after one of Murphy's six Emmy wins.

that inaugural eighth grade day. "And there's this star on the front of the bike. And I pull into the school and one of the school kids came up to me and said, 'You're riding a Jew bike.' And we got into a fight. My initial response was to try and be clever. I pointed out that there's a difference between a five-pointed star and six-pointed star. He didn't find that particularly funny. And he came up and he hit me. And I hit him back. He hit me in the mouth, and I slugged him in the nose. I ended up getting a root canal on my front tooth. And that was my very first day of school in America."

While Emanuel's parents were, he recalls, "alarmed," the remainder of that school year passed largely without incident. Reflecting upon the event decades later, Emanuel recalls Rumson as having had "a fairly decent Jewish community." But the attack stuck with him.

Today, Emanuel remains, in his own words, "reasonably outspoken and honest about my views — politically, religiously and otherwise." In addition to his bustling legal career, he is a strident human rights activist, devoting ample time to such philanthropic endeavors as the Black Jewish Entertainment Alliance, the March on Washington Film Festival and the Faith and Politics Institute, a nonprofit that was led for more than 20 years by the late congressman John Lewis. Emanuel also serves as legal counsel to the Sundance Institute and volunteers with Chrysalis, a charity providing jobs and clothing.

Rodriguez, Emanuel's client for some three decades, notes that outside of business matters, the attorney is "always thoughtful enough to just check in on you as a friend."

"Craig works hard and gets results, but he's also kind, decent, fair and a joy to work with — even for those on the other side of the table," continues Rodriguez. "I think that's key to representation. You really want someone that shares your work ethic and ideals, and Craig truly represents you."

“
Craig works hard
and gets results,
but he's also
kind, decent,
fair and a joy to
work with —
even for those
on the other side
of the table.”

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Robert Rodriguez

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In 2022, Emanuel took a group to Congress and spoke there.

From “Glee” to “Dahmer — Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story,” Murphy is a series creator juggernaut, but the multihyphenate was just starting out when Emanuel inked him as a client.

“One of my most indelible moments with Craig was my very first — when he signed on as my lawyer before I had even sold my first script, ‘Why Can’t I Be Audrey Hepburn?’ to Steven Spielberg,” says Murphy. “He was one of the very first, if not the first, people to believe I could be something. His belief in me and what I could accomplish has always been very moving and important.”

However, Emanuel’s professional trajectory was a circuitous one. In 1975, after a two-year stretch in the States, Emanuel’s family returned to Australia, where he was faced with a choice: What career path did he wish to pursue?

“I never really ever wanted to be a lawyer,” Emanuel admits. “But, you know, you’re 16 and you’ve got to make a decision. In Australia, in those days, you go straight from high school to whatever it is that you’re going to do, and I didn’t want to be a doctor, and I didn’t want to be a scientist. Law was a five-year program. And I thought, well, having a law degree is not a bad thing.”

And so, “very, very early” in life Emanuel enrolled at Melbourne’s Monash University. When he was 19, his father, at just 44, died of brain cancer. Halfway through getting his degree, Emanuel decided to take a couple of months off to travel — and so the young law student embarked on a backpacking excursion through Europe. “I



He was one of the very first, if not the first, people to believe I could be something.”

Ryan Murphy

ended up living in Ibiza for a period in the late ’70s and early ’80s, which was a lot of fun,” he says.

Emanuel returned to law school and, in his final year, penned a thesis exploring taxation on investment in the Australian film industry, a research paper that helped introduce landmark legislation to create tax incentives for the country’s film industry. “I became somewhat of an authority in that space, participating in conversations with government representatives,” says Emanuel. “I watched the legislation go from being a draft bill to being introduced.”

But in 1985, the itch to explore the world again — and the entertainment industry — embedded itself in Emanuel. This time, he headed for Los Angeles.

“My thought process was that I was going to learn something about the industry, take it back to Australia and apply that knowledge and do something in the film space there,” says Emanuel. “I arrived in Los Angeles in February 1985. I really don’t know a lot of people. I wasn’t licensed to practice law. I didn’t have a visa to work. I had no plan at all.”

Screen International editor Elspeth Tavares, who gave Emanuel a job as an executive assistant in the magazine’s LA office during his brief California foray in 1980, helped secure Emanuel a place to stay.

“I worked as a waiter in a restaurant. I drove a graveyard shift as a limo driver. I played piano three nights a week at Chaya Brasserie,” says Emanuel, who, following in his father’s footsteps, studied classical music from age 4.

At one point during that youthful period in Hollywood, Emanuel landed work on a Roger Corman film, making \$20 a day to complete tasks ranging from script rewrites to casting. “I don’t remember the exact name of the film, but there was a widow and a priest character,” says Emanuel. “The script was about a bunch of kids who went to Mexico on vacation, got kidnapped and put to work on a pot farm. Then two of their friends dress up as a nun and a priest and drive down on motorcycles to rescue them.”

Emanuel’s mother was “incredibly supportive,” but Emanuel began to doubt what exactly he was doing with his life. “I struggled,” he says. “I thought, this is great, but this is not what I came to do. And, in those days, there’s no email, no internet, no cell phones. You would



Emanuel lounges with Wim Wenders in Cannes before the premiere of Wenders’ 2014 documentary “The Salt of the Earth.”



Emanuel's passion lies not only in the law but also in social justice issues.

write letters and patiently wait for the phone to ring or for someone to reply. The highlight of my day was watching 'Perry Mason' and 'Mission: Impossible.' I started to think, 'Have I made the wrong decision? Should I go back to Australia?'"

At 25, rootless and with "no obligations to anybody," Emanuel realized that what he needed to succeed was "an entirely different attitude." So he shifted tactics. "I made it a point that anytime I would meet someone, I wouldn't leave the meeting without getting a referral to somebody else," he says. "I started to build a network. And I was writing to a bunch of law firms saying, 'Look, here are my qualifications — give me a job.'"

Nobody responded except for one attorney: Edward Rubin, then-partner at formidable entertainment firm Mitchell Silberberg & Knupp. Rubin didn't have a job to offer Emanuel, but what he did have was connections.

"I go down to [Rubin's] office, and he says, 'I'm going to give you the names of 10 lawyers, and you should write to them and say I've suggested that you reach out,'" recalls Emanuel of that fortuitous meeting. "In his office, there were pictures of Nixon and, I think, Kennedy. I think he may have even driven across the country with Nixon. It was an incredible act of kindness."

Eventually, one of the contacts to whom Emanuel wrote connected him with Scottish entertainment attorney-turned-producing mogul Nigel Sinclair. Sinclair had just moved from

London to Los Angeles, where he was opening the West Coast office of his firm, Sinclair Tenenbaum.

"I called [Nigel] that night and I said, 'Give me a job, pay me anything, and I'll make it worth your while,'" says Emanuel. "And he said, 'Do you have a suit?'"

Emanuel did not have a suit, but he ran out and bought one, got a haircut and met Sinclair at his office the next day. Sinclair offered Emanuel a position — "the equivalent of being a paralegal," he explains — sponsored him for a visa and paid for him to study for the California State Bar, which Emanuel passed on the first try.

Emanuel soon established himself as one of the industry's preeminent entertainment attorneys, focusing on everything from cutting production deals to securing intellectual property for clients. In 1985, well before he was a known commodity outside of Australia, Hogan retained Emanuel and Sinclair to negotiate the U.S. distribution deal of "Crocodile Dundee." After Sinclair dissolved his practice to produce films full time, Emanuel spent the next 20 years as partner at multiservice firm Loeb & Loeb.

Over the past four decades, Emanuel has represented high-profile talent ranging from Julie Delpy and Jennifer Beals to music mogul Clive Davis and Oscar-winning producer Cathy Schulman ("Crash"). He also reps a slate of celebrated international filmmakers, including Israeli writer-director Samuel Maoz, who helmed the critically acclaimed 2017 drama "Foxtrof," and Palestinian filmmaker Hany Abu-Assad, who directed the 2006 Academy Award-nominated drama "Paradise Now."

A firm believer in the power of international discourse, Emanuel, an advisory board member of Creative Community for Peace, a nonprofit



We are fortunate to have Craig's insight, guidance and support in our critical work of countering the rise of antisemitism and anti-Israel activism."

—
Ari Angel



Emanuel with civil rights pioneer Rep. John Lewis.

that promotes artists as a pathway to peace, reps rising and established filmmakers from all over the world, including Egyptian, Israeli, Palestinian and Iranian artists.

"We are fortunate to have Craig's insight, guidance and support in our critical work of countering the rising tide of antisemitism and anti-Israel activism," says Ari Ingel, director of Creative Community for Peace.

Several years back, recognizing an opportunity to meet "leaders from the Arab film community," Emanuel accepted an invite to teach a master class at the Beirut International Film Festival. The festival coincided with Yom Kippur, the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. Emanuel found a way to observe the high holiday while in Lebanon — not the easiest thing to do since an estimated 30 Jews live in Lebanon and there are no public services held at the capital city's one remaining synagogue. But bridging cultural divides has always been one of Emanuel's key passions.

"To be able to engage in a conversation about how we can use media and entertainment as a means of finding commonality —



The truth of the matter is, at the end of the day, you want to be around the people that you enjoy working with."

Craig Emanuel

I'll have that conversation anywhere," says Emanuel. "It was an amazing experience."

Emanuel, who makes his home in Los Angeles with his wife, producer Deborah Zipser — he has two grown children from a previous marriage — is not only a powerhouse in the legal field, but, perhaps even more importantly, is known for being one of the industry's most likable and trustworthy individuals.

"A constant over the 30 years working with Craig has been that whenever I'm about to do a deal and inform someone he is my attorney, it's always met with a 'Oh, I love Craig! We can figure this out!'" says Rodriguez.

But as dedicated as he is to his career, wanderlust has never fully left Emanuel. There was a moment six or seven years ago when the seasoned attorney pondered departing the legal arena "for something else." Then Paul Hastings came along. And it was, as they say, an "attractive" offer Emanuel could not refuse. Among those perks was getting to work with attorneys Mickey Mayerson and Susan Williams, Emanuel's co-chairs at Paul Hastings' entertainment and media division.

"The truth of the matter is, at the end of the day, you want to be around the people that you enjoy working with, and I couldn't imagine not working with those people," says Emanuel. "And sometimes, when the train starts to leave the station, it's not easy to get off the platform. But, as it turned out, my business has thrived at Paul Hastings. I spend time doing what I love — which is finding business and doing deals." 🎯



CONGRATULATIONS
**CRAIG
EMANUEL**
ON THIS
WELL-DESERVED AWARD

*Your guidance is invaluable.
Your grace immeasurable.*

WITH ALL OUR GRATITUDE

SIGHT UNSEEN

Attorney to Activist



For Power of Law Honoree Craig Emanuel, there's no end to giving

By Malina Saval

Growing up in Australia, civil rights in the U.S. were not part of Craig Emanuel's school curriculum. So when the future power attorney moved to Los Angeles in the 1980s, he "read everything" he could get his hands on.

"I was fascinated," says Emanuel. "And when it was the 50th anniversary of the marches on the Edmund Pettus Bridge [in 2015], I turned to [my wife] and said, 'I want to go to Selma.'"

An avid photographer, Emanuel has "saved every negative [he's] shot" from the age of 6. He'd photographed historic events like President Barack Obama's inauguration and wanted to do the same in Selma, Ala. Upon the suggestion of a colleague, Emanuel reached out to the Faith & Politics Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit, nonpartisan organization founded in 1991 to bridge racial, religious and political schisms among politicians. Rep. John Lewis, who died in 2020, organized the group's annual civil rights pilgrimage to Selma. Emanuel and his wife made plans to join the organization there.

About 30,000 people turned up for that anniversary, among them 120 senators and members of Congress. "The security was insane," says Emanuel, who wore a custom-designed T-shirt with the slogan: "I am an Australian. I am a Jew. Today I march for the freedom & equality of all!"

The crowd in Selma swelled to such an unmanageable size that day that state officials were forced at the last minute to cap the number of participants. But Emanuel was determined.

"I see out of the corner of my eye five or six state troopers who are walking together down the semi-closed area in the direction of where the bridge is," he says. "And I said to my wife, let's just fall behind. And we did. And at some point the state troopers turned around and they let us walk with them. And it was incredible."

From that moment on, Emanuel has been a staunch supporter of the Faith & Politics Institute. He is an active board member and has accompanied the organization on trips to places such as Underground Railroad sites in upstate New York and the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C., site of the 2015 massacre. Last July, Emanuel organized the group's first trip to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C.

"It's an amazing organization," says Emanuel. "Their mission is really to create civility and dialogue in government. Not an easy thing in this environment."

"One of the problems we have in society is that there is a lot of talking, but not a lot of conversation," he adds.

Emanuel aims to reverse that trend not only through his work with the Faith & Politics Institute, but also at the March on Washington Film Festival, for which he arranged a screening of the 2019 Israeli documentary "Advocate," which follows international human rights attorney Lea Tsemel.

Emanuel also serves on the advisory board of the Black-Jewish Entertainment Alliance, which launched to bring the two communities together in solidarity. Its formation was inspired by the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr., Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and the many Blacks and Jews who stood side by side fighting for civil rights and working to erase bigotry and hatred in society. Thus far, the alliance has hosted conversations and events with entertainment and political figures ranging from Gene Simmons and Sharon Osbourne to Sen. Cory Booker and Ben Silverman, chairman and co-CEO of Propagate Content.

"There was a time when the two communities were a lot more closely aligned because they had a lot of common interest," says Emanuel. "I think a number of people felt that we should figure out a path to make these two communities more engaging. For me, it's no different than finding a way to engage in conversation that's not just talking. And it does fit in with everything else that I've learned in the civil rights-related space."

"Anything that we can do in society today that's going to bring groups together to engage in a conversation is a worthwhile endeavor," says Emanuel. "And so, I'll support anything that has that as a mission." 📌



Craig Emanuel in Selma, Ala., marking the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, which galvanized the civil rights movement.

Variety's Power of Law Breakfast Keynotes



Variety interviews the duo in front of Hollywood's top legal minds

This year, *Variety's* Power of Law breakfast will treat attendees to not one but two keynote conversations with industry players: veteran showrunner Damon Lindelof, interviewed by *Variety* Co-Editor-in-Chief Cynthia Littleton, and Fuzzy Door president Erica Huggins, interviewed by *Variety* Chief Production Officer Claudia Eller.

At the Power of Law event — where City National Bank will be presenting partner and Signature Resolution an official partner — the pair will offer their insights into the rapidly evolving entertainment landscape to an audience of invited attorneys who form this year's Legal Impact Report honorees.

Damon Lindelof Storyteller and Disruptor

The prolific, award-winning creator, known for his ambitious and genre-bending scripts, will share with *Variety* Co-Editor-in-Chief Cynthia Littleton his thoughts on how the creative community is adjusting to the upheaval in the content business and how strong legal representation is vital for navigating these choppy waters. The conversation will also delve into the showrunner's evolution as a writer and executive producer as he expands his activities to mentoring and shepherding TV projects created by other writers.

Lindelof's television credits include critically acclaimed HBO superhero series "Watchmen" and drama series "The Leftovers"; he was co-creator and showrunner on both. He also serves as exec producer on "Mrs. Davis," a limited series debuting on Peacock April 20.

Previously, Lindelof was co-creator and co-showrunner (along with Carlton Cuse) of ABC's seminal "Lost," the mind-blowing sci-fi series that ran for six seasons starting in 2004 and proved to be an inflection point in TV storytelling. His feature film credits include "Star Trek," "Prometheus," "World War Z" and "Tomorrowland."

The Stephen King fan began his pro career as a writer on drama series "Wasteland" and anthology series "Undressed." In 2000-2001 he worked as a writer on CBS crime drama series "Nash Bridges," and then wrote and produced another crime drama for NBC, "Crossing Jordan."

In 2019, Lindelof joined other members of the Writers Guild of America that fired their agents. The move came in support of the WGA's battle against the talent agencies' practice of packaging, whereby tenpercenteries negotiate a lucrative overall packaging fee from the studios for each film or TV show instead of collecting the usual 10% fee from each client working on a given project.

In 2022, the writers emerged victorious. Packaging fees on new projects ended, ushering in a fresh era in TV production dealmaking just as the industry reached a crescendo of disruption.



Damon Lindelof



Erica Huggins

Erica Huggins Creative Rainmaker

Huggins is president of Seth MacFarlane's Fuzzy Door and oversees all development and creative direction for the production company's content creation, including its multiyear television pact with Universal Studio Group as well as endeavors in film, literature, music and digital.

Under Fuzzy Door's Universal TV deal, she is executive producing Peacock's "Ted" TV series, starring the foul-mouthed teddy bear who starred in the film versions of the franchise, and recently released Peacock's disaster series "The End Is Nye" hosted by science educator Bill Nye.

Up next, Huggins is executive producing "The Winds of War," a Little Rock Nine series; TV adaptations of the celebrated novel "All Our Wrong Todays"; and dystopian sci-fi short film "Skywatch." She and Fuzzy Door are also in production on Netflix's new animated take on Norman Lear's classic sitcom, "Good Times."

On the feature side, Huggins executive produced Hulu's "Books of Blood," a film based on Clive Barker's horror anthology book of the same name. She is also executive producing and developing a reimagined version of "Revenge of the Nerds" with the Lucas Bros. for 20th Century Studios, and a remake of "The Naked Gun" for Paramount Pictures.

With Huggins and MacFarlane at the helm, Fuzzy Door produces Emmy-nominated Hulu space adventure series "The Orville," Emmy-winning animated comedy series "Family Guy," fan-favorite series "American Dad!," and Emmy-winning "Cosmos: Possible Worlds," now available on Disney+.

Prior to her present gig, Huggins served as president at Imagine Entertainment, focusing on expanding Imagine's independent model of incubating material in-house for all feature development and the company's feature animation division. During her tenure there, she produced "The Spy Who Dumped Me," "Get On Up," and "The Dark Tower," among others.

During her conversation with Huggins, Eller expects to address such issues as how an indie production company navigates through this time of upheaval and transformation; what key factors must be addressed before greenlighting a project; and how to prepare for a potential writers' strike this year.

"Since her years at Imagine," says Eller, "I've always thought of Erica as someone who is incredibly cultured and smart with great creative instincts." — Peter Caranicas

TIPSHEET

WHAT: *Variety's* Power of Law Breakfast

WHEN: April 20, 2023

WHERE: The Maybourne Beverly Hills, Beverly Hills

WEB: variety.com

GIBSON DUNN

We congratulate all of the
2023 Legal Impact Report honorees,
including our partners



Brian Ascher



Scott Edelman



Kevin Masuda



Benjamin Ross



Ilissa Samplin



Orin Snyder

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The Man Who Invented the Hollywood Divorce



How Pioneering Attorney Sorrell Trope Revolutionized Family Law

By Malina Saval

Michael Trope remembers the day he entered the living room of his childhood home in the Brentwood section of Los Angeles to find Cary Grant sipping a martini. Michael's father, famed attorney Sorrell Trope, was representing Grant in his 1968 divorce from Dyan Cannon.

"My father used to love to tell the story about how Cary Grant became his client," says Michael Trope, an L.A.-based trial lawyer and former sports agent.

"Cary Grant went to a mattress store to buy a mattress," Michael Trope continues. "He was talking to the mattress salesman and testing out mattresses because he wanted to buy a bed. And he started complaining to this mattress salesman about his divorce. The mattress salesman then said, 'Oh, I went through a divorce. And I had a great experience with my lawyer. He did a really phenomenal job for me.' And Cary Grant said, 'Well, who was that?' And the mattress salesman went and got my dad's business card and gave it to Cary Grant. And then my dad wound up representing Cary Grant for over 20 years."

The anecdote is notable for myriad reasons, among them the fact that Sorrell Trope, a legacy-making pioneer in the arena of family law who died in May 2020 at age 93, spent his career advocating on behalf of high-profile movie stars—he represented Nicole Kidman in her split from Tom Cruise—as well as small-time salesclerks.

"Sorrell took care of people," says Linda Trope, Sorrell's widow. They met when she was his legal secretary and were happily married for 54 years.



Cary Grant's divorce from Dyan Cannon was handled by Sorrell Trope, who repped Grant for more than 20 years.

CONGRATULATIONS

We join in celebrating all those recognized this year as ***Variety's* 2023 Legal Impact Honorees**, especially our colleagues **Jeff Biederman, Dan Black, Steve Plinio, Jess Rosen, Bobby Rosenbloum, Mathew Rosengart** and **Paul Schindler**. We also are proud to congratulate **Monica Zhang** on being named to the **Up Next** list.



JEFF BIEDERMAN



DAN BLACK



STEVE PLINIO



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Sorrell Trope, who died in 2020, left an enduring legacy on the law.

"I remember we went to Hillside [cemetery] to buy plots," continues Linda Trope. "This was around 2017 after he retired, and the woman who was taking care of us looked at us, and she said [to Sorrell], 'You handled my divorce 25 years ago. I could not afford you. And you did not charge me.' That was who Sorrell was. He did a tremendous amount of pro bono work."

There is not a divorce attorney in Hollywood today — or any American city for that matter — that is not indebted, in some way, to Sorrell Trope's groundbreaking professional imprint. In the 1950s and '60s, divorce law was considered the bargain basement of the legal arena. It had no clout, no cachet. "It was kind of like getting your fingernails dirty," says Michael Trope.

Sorrell Trope changed all that, elevating the field to a status it had not seen before.

Born in upstate New York, Sorrell Trope was 13 when his family relocated to Los Angeles. He graduated top of his class in 1949 from the University of Southern California Gould School of Law — "Sorrell was the youngest person in his class," says Linda Trope — and was a practicing attorney by age 21, hanging up his first shingle on a stretch of North La Cienega Ave.

Striking out solo was an act of necessity, as Antisemitism was rife. In the late 1940s, no white shoe firm would hire Sorrell Trope, "a Jewish kid from New York," says Neal Hersh, founding partner of Hersh Manis, for whom Sorrell Trope was a mentor, friend and occasional legal adversary. "He couldn't get a job in Los Angeles with all of the fancy firms—so he struck out on his own. That in and of itself was trailblazing... [but] he had no choice."

In the beginning, Sorrell Trope was, per Michael Trope, "a black bag lawyer," handling almost any type of case that came his way—breach of contract, collection, criminal cases. It was during these "wild, woolly days of divorce law" that Sorrell Trope retained his first divorce client, Mark Taper, the American-British financier, real estate magnate and philanthropist.

"Mark was married to a much younger woman [actress Roberta Gale], who got pregnant, and Taper had some suspicions that because of his advanced age, he might not be the father," says Michael Trope. "My father produced evidence showing that somebody else was probably the father of the child. And the bottom line is that this gal didn't do very well in the divorce — she got slaughtered. The case got a lot of attention because it was sort of salacious. All of a sudden, all these people in Beverly Hills started hiring my dad. He was getting phone calls from a lot of the big firms who didn't do family law, but they had corporate clients who were getting divorced. And they needed a go-to guy to whom they could send their wealthy clients."

Later, Sorrell's brother, Eugene, would join the firm and Trope and Trope would balloon to become California's largest boutique family law practice, boasting a staff of some 30 attorneys.

"My father created a sophistication where it wasn't just a divorce," says Michael Trope. "It was figuring out the law in terms of dividing assets, valuing businesses, child custody — he took the practice to a higher level than just trying to figure out who was cheating on who, because there was a time [before 1970] that California was not no-fault. Almost every big or important case in Los Angeles for a good number of years — my father was on one side or the other."

Sorrell Trope was also a man of impeccable taste, partial to Hermes ties and Turnbull & Asser custom-made shirts. He drove a Bentley and dressed to the nines every day. Says Linda Trope, "He always wore cufflinks."

"I think Sorrell felt that in order to be respected as a lawyer by your clients, aside from your performance, you had to look like a lawyer," says Mark Vincent Kaplan, former partner at Trope and Trope and current founding partner of Schuchman, Kaplan, & Gekht.

"He had an amazing command of the courtroom," adds Kaplan. "I would see expert witnesses literally stumble over their words and be observably nervous before they were to be cross-examined by him. I think he was intimidating to many of the lawyers at the firm, and certainly to the lawyers who opposed him."

As foreboding as Sorrell Trope was in court, he was likewise "a sentimentalist," says Kaplan, generous of his time, spirit and advice.

"I don't want to say took me under his wing, but he sort of did," says Hersh. "When I was building my firm, I would call him up and say, 'Can we go have lunch?' And he always accepted. And we would go out and I would ask him, 'How did you build your firm? How do you manage the work?' I remember he said two things: 'You have to learn how to delegate and you have to have a good memory.' I always took that to heart."

Whether it was teaching a law class at USC or the fellowship he established at the Harriet Buhai Center for Family Law to assist low-income victims of domestic violence, Sorrell Trope left an indelible mark in the legal world, says Linda Trope. More than that, he helped save people's lives.

"He would give people our home phone number. He was always connected and concerned about his clients," she says. "He was more than just a lawyer to so many of his clients — he was like a father." 📞



Sorrell Trope represented Britney Spears in her split from Kevin Federline.



© Luke Fontana

Our Top 10 Reasons for Celebrating the 2023 *Variety* Legal Impact Report

David Fink
Lee Brenner
Sam Djahanbani
Sarah Cronin
William Briggs
Paul Bernstein
Nikki Kerman
Nick Jacobus
Josh McWhorter
Kevin Ghassomian

We congratulate all those recognized in this year's Impact Report, including 10 members of Venable's own Entertainment and Media team.

Learn more at [Venable.com/EntertainmentandMedia](https://venable.com/EntertainmentandMedia)

VENABLE LLP

Litigation



John V. Berlinski
Principal



Ronald J. Nessim
Principal



Julia B. Cherlow
Principal

Bird, Marella, Boxer, Wolpert, Nessim, Dooks, Lincenberg & Rhow

The launch of major studios' in-house streaming platforms put Hollywood self-dealing into hyperdrive, and the Bird Marella team has made headlines litigating the fallout. Berlinski resolved producer Katie O'Connell Marsh's multiyear litigation against Gaumont Television related to the Netflix series "Narcos" on the eve of trial in November 2022 and is currently repping Chuck Norris in a lawsuit alleging underpayment of profit participation for his series "Walker, Texas Ranger." He also currently reps Genting Group, the second-largest casino operator in the world, in ongoing matters related to the development and operation of Genting SkyWorlds, a billion-dollar Fox-themed amusement park outside of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Nessim and Cherlow engineered an eve-of-trial settlement in 2022 for the holders of a package commission on the original "MacGyver" in a breach of contract suit against CBS Studios regarding the current iteration of the series, and they're repping "Supernatural" creator Eric Kripke in an upcoming arbitration for a nine-figure profit-participation dispute with Warner Bros. Nessim also regularly reps SAG-AFTRA in connection with employment restraints in actor contracts.



John Berlinski resolved litigation related to the hit Netflix series "Narcos," starring Pedro Pascal.

Consistent inconsistencies: "The standards for judging these self-dealing transactions are often very similar or identical, but the methodologies that these different studios use to arrive at self-dealing license fees are wildly different," says Berlinski.



Determining what the contract might be, if there ever was one, is like being a detective."

— **Lee Brenner**



Lee Brenner
Chair, Entertainment & Media Litigation



William Briggs
Partner



Sarah Cronin
Partner



Dave Fink
Partner
Venable

Brenner repped Mattel pressing a Barbie trademark lawsuit over a snack product that was settled in September. Briggs defends Da Baby in accusations against him regarding rental

property damage and alleged assault & battery. Cronin specializes in media and entertainment insurance recovery, copyright, idea theft, trademark and profit-participation disputes. Fink reps studios and production companies pursuing and defending litigation. Fink works breach of contract, profit participations, copyright and intellectual property matters. Sometimes he handles talent in those matters. Their clients include studios, production companies, a sports coach, celebrities, directors and TV series showrunners. The quartet, all trial attorneys, are based in Century City. Other matters handled by these attorneys remain confidential.

Dusty and moldy: When TV shows and movies from the 1980s and earlier are revived, Brenner says that an archival paper chase ensues in reviewing dusty old contracts. He adds that often those contracts are unsigned with back-and-forth correspondence attached, although it's often an exchange of disagreements. "Determining what the contract might be, if there ever was one, is like being a detective," he says.

Congratulations to all the Latham & Watkins honorees of *Variety's* 2023 Legal Impact Report, including the following members of our global Entertainment, Sports and Media Practice and Industry Groups



Ken Deutsch
Global Co-Chair, Entertainment,
Sports & Media Practice Group
Century City



Marvin Putnam
Global Chair, Entertainment,
Sports & Media Industry Group
Century City

Transactional Team



Nancy Bruington
Century City



Kendall Johnson
Century City



Rick Offsay
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Jonathan West
Century City

Litigation & Trial Team



Robert Ellison
Century City



Andrew Gass
San Francisco



Jessica Stebbins Bina
Century City



Laura Washington
Century City

Up Next



Omeed Anvar
Century City

**Scott Edelman**

Partner, Co-Chair, Media, Entertainment & Technology Practice Group

Orin Snyder

Partner, Co-Chair Global Trial Practice Group

Ilissa Samplin

Partner, Co-Chair, Global Trade Secrets Practice Group

Brian Ascher

Partner

Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher

Edelman and Samplin represented NBCUniversal and Warner Bros. in multiple confidential TV-related arbitrations, and separately they won Apple/iTunes a verdict defeating willful infringement claims from music composers last year. Edelman successfully defended Netflix in November against an employment emotional-distress claim. Snyder defended MGM in settling a Starz lawsuit in October over film exclusivity, and also defended Lady Gaga from threatened legal action over a hit song. In July, Snyder and Ascher won Bob Dylan a dismissal over allegations of long-ago abuse, and the duo separately got songwriting ownership claims dismissed for clients Dylan and Universal Music. The four won summary judgment dismissals for AMC Networks in “The Walking Dead” profit-participation lawsuit a year ago. Edelman and Samplin are in Los Angeles; Snyder and Ascher work in New York.



The Gibson Dunn quartet won a suit for AMC Networks involving series “The Walking Dead.”

Reality check: According to Ascher, docudramas based on true events are triggering more defamation lawsuits. “There are a growing number of cases that are working their way through the system,” he says, adding that producers are beefing up their posted

disclaimers. Samplin observes that more states enact anti-SLAPP laws bolstering defenses for freedom of expression. “The implication is that content creators will have a means to get meritless cases related to speech disposed of quickly,” she adds.

From your partners and everyone at **SA&M**,
congratulations to **GREG AKSELRUD, DAN ROZANSKY,**
KELLY SIOBHAN LAFFEY, and **CELINA KIRCHNER**
on your selections to *Variety's* 2023 “**Legal Impact Report.**”



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Covington congratulates our colleagues on being named to *Variety's* Legal Impact Report

With our culture of collaboration, Covington's team of transactional, regulatory, and trial lawyers work seamlessly to advise media clients on their most complex and precedent-setting deals and disputes.



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COVINGTON

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NEW YORK PALO ALTO SAN FRANCISCO SEOUL SHANGHAI WASHINGTON



Rob Ellison represented Marcus Lemonis pursuing arbitration over CNBC show "The Profit," which Lemonis hosts.



Dennis S. Ellis
Partner

Ellis George Cipollone O'Brien Annaguey

Ellis' career changed direction after he attended Cal State Fullerton on a football scholarship with hopes of going pro. Instead, he wound up following in the footsteps of his mother, who earned her law degree in night school and went on to become a Superior Court judge. After nearly 25 years focused on corporate litigation at the Paul Hastings firm, Ellis joined his current firm in 2020, taking on more clients from the entertainment world, including childhood friend Faizon Love, whom he repped in a (now-settled) race discrimination suit against Universal over his removal from the overseas posters for "Couples Retreat." He also filed suit on behalf of Bam Margera over his dismissal from "Jackass Forever." Other clients include cosmetic companies L'Oréal, Avon and Sunday Riley.

Believing in justice: "I can't practice in a profession that I think is inherently unfair," Ellis says.



Rob Ellison
Partner



Andy Gass
Partner



Jessica Stebbins Bina
Partner



Laura Washington
Partner

Latham & Watkins

Ellison repped TV host Marcus Lemonis pursuing arbitration over CNBC show "The Profit" in May. For concert giant Live Entertainment, Gass and Bina handle ongoing litigation, including the Taylor Swift ticketing breakdown, and public policy initiatives. Gass reps the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts asserting fair use before the U.S. Supreme Court over the "Prince Series" of art prints of a rock star sourced from another person's photograph. Bina defended Tom Brady, Gisele Bündchen

and Larry David in a November lawsuit related their roles as presenters in advertising for troubled FTX crypto currency outfit. Washington advises actor/filmmaker Edward Norton and affiliates over a fatal on-set accident, with nine of 10 lawsuits settled. Other clients include Beyoncé/Parkwood Entertainment; Endeavor; concert promoter First Access Entertainment; Hollywood Foreign Press Assn.; and ICM Partners in its June sale. Ellison, Bina and Washington are based in Century City; Gass works out of San Francisco.

Live music litigation: Washington expects consumers, tired of pandemic confinement, to continue to surge into live music concerts for experiential entertainment, which likely will trigger an uptick in ticketing and audience-safety issues. "I think we're going to see more legal issues around music," she says.



I can't practice in a profession that I think is inherently unfair."

Dennis S. Ellis



Patricia L. Glaser
Partner, Chair, Litigation Dept.



Kerry Garvis Wright
Partner, Chair, Employment Dept.



Andrew Baum
Partner



Julie Gerchik
Partner

Glaser Weil

The quartet reps exec producer Karyn McCarthy pursuing a wrongful termination lawsuit involving Disney+ series "The Acolyte" in March, and separately Ron Burkle's Yucaipa Companies in a breach-of-contract lawsuit from not participating in a 2018 purchase of Weinstein Co. Glaser, Garvis Wright, Baum and Gerchik are in Century City. The attorneys also repped Jeff Zucker in his CNN separation and as witness in claims by former employee Chris Cuomo against CNN parent WarnerMedia. They also advised Imax in defending against a \$7 million commissions claim by a former employee, resolved in December. Other clients include CBS-Paramount, Sony Pictures, rewards-oriented marketing agency Infillion, Pittsburgh Penguins-related partnership Lemieux Group, Hollywood business management giant NKSFB, boxing's Freddie Roach, Lincoln Project's Steve Schmidt and Ryan Seacrest. Most recently, Glaser repped longtime Marvel Studios executive Victoria Alonso in her rancorous departure from Disney.

Bad form: Glaser says threats of frivolous lawsuits that seek to leverage fear of bad publicity for quick out-of-court settlements are rising: "Shame on lawyers for doing it. What you've done is hurt claims where somebody has genuinely been injured." Baum adds that the arm-twisting includes threats to drag along a prospective defendant's uninformed employer, "putting self-imposed pressure to settle what otherwise would be just a frivolous case."



David Grossman
Co-Chair, Litigation

Jim Curry
Partner

John Gatti
Partner

Wook Hwang
Partner

Loeb & Loeb

Loeb & Loeb's litigation team has been in the news with a gaggle of high-pro-

file rights disputes in recent months. Grossman is defending Paramount against the estate of Truman Capote's claim that they own the rights to the 1961 film "Breakfast at Tiffany's"; Netflix and Matt and Ross Duffer in a copyright infringement suit regarding "Stranger Things"; and NBCUniversal, Gary Oldman and Working Title in a suit by a writer alleging that material from his scripts about Winston Churchill wound up in their film "Darkest Hour." Curry focuses on commercial and IP litigation, defending CBS in lawsuits over its program "Judge Judy" and Gaumont Television USA in a pair of profit-participation lawsuits. Gatti successfully represented singer/songwriter Tracy Chapman in a copyright infringement case based on rapper and songwriter Nicky Minaj's sampling of Chapman's works without permission, in which the result was a judgment entered in federal court in Chapman's favor for the full amount requested. Hwang has been



David Grossman is defending the Duffer brothers and Netflix in a "Stranger Things" suit.

repping Condé Nast in its trademark and false advertising action against Drake and 21 Savage over their use of a fake issue of Vogue to promote their album "Her Loss."

Purloined pitches, stolen scripts: "In the greater group of laypeople, there are assumptions about ideas being taken, but in my experience, that doesn't happen," says Grossman.



In the greater group of laypeople, there are assumptions about ideas being taken, but in my experience, that doesn't happen."

— **David Grossman**

We salute

Bryan Sullivan & Devin McRae

for their inclusion in this year's

Variety "Legal Impact Report."



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**Mitch Kamin**

Partner, Co-Chair, Entertainment & Media Industry Group, Co-Chair, Commercial Litigation Practice Group

Neema Sahni

Partner, Co-Chair, Music Industry Group, Vice Chair, Sports Industry Group

Jonathan Sperling

Partner, Chair, Music Industry Group

Matt DelNero

Partner, Co-Chair, Entertainment & Media Industry Group, Co-Chair, Diversity & Inclusion Initiative

Covington & Burling

Kamin worked middle-of-litigation settlements for broadcaster Nexstar Media earlier this year, resolving separate contract disputes over cable TV retransmission fees with Charter Communications and Comcast. Kamin and Sahni repped a Paramount Global subsidiary overturning an Illinois cable franchise fee targeting streamer Paramount+. Sahni and Sperling repped Universal Music, Warner Music and Sony Music Entertainment settling in August their copyright infringement cases against Charter Communications and Bright House Networks for allegedly facilitating piracy. DelNero led a team getting regulatory approval for Spanish-language broadcaster Univision buying \$4.8 billion in media assets last year to create TelevisaUnivision. Kamin and Sahni work in Century City; Sperling is based in New York; and regulatory focused DelNero is in Washington, D.C. The foursome is a litigation team that leverages regulatory and transactional insights.



TelevisaUnivision, which airs “Mirá Quién Baila,” was one of Matt DelNero’s clients.

Contractually speaking: Hollywood companies that increasingly feed their content to in-house video streaming platforms walk a tightrope with third-party buyers, talent with royalty participations and financial partners expecting traditional sequential

distribution, say Kamin and DelNero. “It’s a real balancing act because most everyone is in the same boat wanting to do the same thing,” per Kamin. So contracts across Hollywood get scrutinized for justification to support various views on content distribution.

MSF

Meister Seelig & Fein PLLC

Meister Seelig & Fein congratulates all of the honorees recognized in Variety’s 2023 Legal Impact Report, including the members of the MSF Crisis Management team:

**Mitchell Schuster**

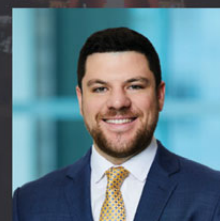
Partner & Chair | Crisis Management & Commercial Litigation



Stacey M. Ashby
Partner



Kevin A. Fritz
Partner



Kevin M. Hutzal
Associate

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Meister Seelig & Fein PLLC is a New York City-based business law firm driven by entrepreneurial energy and focused on delivering results for clients. Our accomplished lawyers, team approach, and integrity-first philosophy ensure that we are partners in our clients’ success.



Dale Kinsella
Partner

Michael Kump
Partner

Lawrence Iser
Partner

Shawn Holley
Partner

Kinsella Weitzman Iser Kump Holley

The Kinsella Weitzman litigation team handles a wide range of high-profile

cases involving everything from corporate matters to the most intimate interactions. Trial lawyer Kinsella is well-known for having negotiated a \$200 million settlement for creator Frank Darabont and CAA in their profit-participation suit against AMC over "The Walking Dead" in 2021, and Kump had the nearly \$31 million award he won from Kevin Spacey for "House of Cards" producer MRC confirmed last August. Music-focused Iser scored a confidential settlement for producers/songwriters Justin Raisen, Jeremiah Raisen and Justin "Yves" Rothman in a suit over Lizzo's failure to credit them for their role in creating her song "Truth Hurts." Kump and Holley's client list reads like it's been ripped from the headlines: Kump is the longtime counsel to Kardashian and Jenner family members and Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. Holly is currently defending Shia LaBeouf in an ongoing civil case filed by FKA Twigs, Danny Masterson in the retrial of his criminal

sexual assault case and boxing legend George Foreman and Aerosmith front man Steven Tyler in cases involving sexual assaults that allegedly occurred more than 40 and 50 years ago, respectively.

This isn't Twitter: "We don't make judgments," says Iser. "Distasteful or illegal, we as lawyers represent our clients."

“

We don't make judgments. Distasteful or illegal, we as lawyers represent our clients."

— **Lawrence Iser**



Michael Kump reps the Kardashian clan, whose series "The Kardashians" unspools on Hulu.

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Congratulations to the O'Melveny corporate and litigation attorneys recognized by *Variety* for continuing that proud tradition.

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Steven Marenberg
Partner, Chair, Entertainment
& Media Litigation Practice

Tamerlin Godley
Partner, Entertainment
& Media Litigation Practice

James (Bo) Pearl
Partner, Entertainment
& Media Litigation Practice

Josh Gordon
Of Counsel, Entertainment
& Media Litigation Practice

Paul Hastings

Marenberg reps ABC Television and 20th Century Fox Animation for their ongoing defense of policies mandating employee vaccinations. Marenberg and Gordon are working for Pixar in a beach-of-contract case dating to June. Godley defends Bravo Media and NBCUniversal in federal litigation bought by NeNe Leakes alleging racial issues on the set of “The Real Housewives of Atlanta.” Godley also handles an ongoing arbitration for play-to-earn blockchain adventure game Mobland over rights involving NFTs. Pearl specializes in defamation and free speech disputes in the entertainment and sports sectors. The Century City-based litigation group’s other clients include Walt Disney Co., NBCUniversal, Warner Bros. Discovery, Activision Blizzard, golfer Greg Norman and William Morris Endeavor. The attorneys also work investigations and litigation involving sexual harassment, gender bias and other allegations of misconduct.



Tamerlin Godley reps Bravo and NBCUniversal in a case involving former “Real Housewives” star NeNe Leakes, center.

Drawing the lines: Godley notes that it’s unsettled how the law will apply to deepfakes that manipulate images and audio of celebrities, showing them doing things that aren’t genuine. “It’s obviously a disruptive moment and the industry is trying to find its way on various different fronts,” says Godley. Celebs get no compensation for deepfake usage.



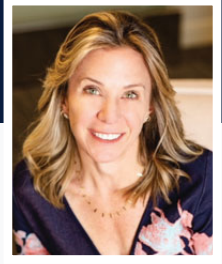
It’s obviously a disruptive moment and the industry is trying to find its way on various fronts.”

— Tamerlin Godley

BLANKROME

Congratulations to our partners
Marilyn Chinitz, Brett Ward,
 and **Kristina Royce**
 on their selection to *Variety’s* 2023
“Legal Impact Report.”





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Daniel Petrocelli

Partner, Trial Practice Chair, Firm Vice Chair

Molly Lens

 Partner, Entertainment,
Sports & Media Group Co-Chair

Drew Breuder

Partner

Matt Kline

Partner

O'Melveny & Myers

The venerable O'Melveny & Myers (founded in Los Angeles in 1885) boasts an appropriately impressive entertainment litigation team, led by Petrocelli, who first rose to national prominence winning a wrongful death suit against O.J. Simpson in 1997. Petrocelli's recent victories include securing a new trial for NBCUniversal in a \$71 million profit-participation case involving the series "Columbo"; winning a motion to compel arbitration for Warner Bros. in its ongoing disputes with film financier Village Roadshow (with Kline); successfully resolving Activision Blizzard's executive poaching suit against Netflix (with Lens); and confidential cases for Disney involving profit participation on several iconic TV series (with Breuder). Lens and Petrocelli are also handling a series of lawsuits involving copyright termination rights for iconic Marvel characters (including Spider-Man, Iron Man, Thor, Ant-Man and Black Widow) and Lens is defending Paramount in a copyright infringement lawsuit over the sequel "Top Gun: Maverick" involving a 1983 article that served as the source material for the original 1986 movie.

Profit-participation potential on self-owned streamers: "I think you often see properties do better than they would have, but because of the interest in exploiting what is yours," says Lens. "Also, the studios very intentionally make sure that that they would stand up as if they were third-party deals."


Marvin Putnam

 Partner, Chair, Entertainment,
Sports & Media Industry Group

Latham & Watkins

Putnam defends Tom Brady, Gisele Bündchen and Larry David against claims for fronting crypto-currency advertising. The Century City-based litigator settled a wrongful death lawsuit for concert promoter First Access Entertainment in February. He also reps Beyoncé/Parkwood Entertainment, Hollywood Foreign Press Assn., ICM Partners in its sale and Miramax defending Harvey Weinstein-related matters.

Taking off the gloves: Putnam says that celebrities are becoming less inclined to shrug off defamation, as social media spews more trash talk and serious journalism is diluted by free-wheeling digital media. It's "open season for defamation in a way that I've never seen before," he says. Putnam adds that it's a delicate decision whether to press claims because journalists have legal protections, while celebrities do not.


Mathew Rosengart

 Shareholder, Media & Entertainment
Litigation Practice

Greenberg Traurig

After freeing Britney Spears from a conservatorship 17 months ago, Rosengart still represents the pop singer in follow-on matters alleging mismanagement, dissipation of funds, fee disputes and accounting issues. Earlier this month, after two years of litigation, Rosengart, along with fellow GT shareholders Chuck Birenbaum and Jonathan S. Sack, secured a victory for CORE (Community Organized Relief Effort) and actor/activist Sean Penn wherein, upon hearing the National Labor Relations Board's evidence at



(It's) open season for defamation in a way that I've never seen before."

Marvin Putnam

trial, Judge Lisa D. Ross dismissed a complaint NLRB filed against the organization. "It was an honor, as always, to represent CORE and Sean Penn, and to uphold important principles of law," said Rosengart following the victory. Other Rosengart clients include Steven Spielberg, Michael Bay, Casey Affleck, Gisele Bündchen, Keanu Reeves and Canadian rockers Arcade Fire. *Variety* awarded him its Power of Law Award in 2022 for legal excellence and philanthropy.

Personal touch: During the pandemic, depositions were video-conferenced, and Rosengart is glad that it's back mostly to in-person. "The logjam has broken," says the attorney, adding that he's as busy as ever.


Kristina Royce

Partner

Marilyn Chinitz

Partner

Brett Ward

Partner

Blank Rome

The Blank Rome team specializes in matrimonial law, an inherently contentious, emotional and personal field made all the more intense by their focus on celebrity and high-net-worth clients. Although their cases tend to be highly confidential, many have been widely covered in the press, including their handling of recent divorces for Channing Tatum, Jeff Garlin, Forest Whitaker and Arnold Schwarzenegger by Royce, and model/actress/author Emily Ratajowski and Pamala Davis, the wife of 1-800-LAWYERS founder Bruce Davis, by Ward. Oft-quoted in the press, Chinitz has handled high-profile divorces for movie stars Tom Cruise and Michael Douglas and TV personality Wendy Williams over the course of her more than 40 years as an attorney. Royce and Ward co-chair the firm's family law practice out of its Los Angeles and New York offices, respectively, and Chinitz works out of New York City and Greenwich, Conn., where she lives.

It's not business, it's personal: "They call attorneys two different things: lawyers and counselors. And in the matrimonial family law field, the term counselor plays a much larger role than in many other aspects of the law," says Ward.



Blank Rome handled a number of celeb divorces, including Emily Ratajowski's.



Mathew Rosengart works with Sean Penn, above, and his organization CORE.



Daniel Rozansky
Partner

Greg Akselrud
Partner; Chair, Internet, Digital Media
& Entertainment Practice

Kelly Siobhan Laffey
Partner

Celina Kirchner
Senior Counsel

Stubbs Alderton & Markiles

The SA&M entertainment team specializes in cutting-edge investment and M&A deals and disputes. Litigator Rozansky is defending SSS Film Capital in an ongoing suit over its emergency financing of the 2022 film “The Fall-

out” and he works alongside Kirchner to help top unscripted TV producers protect their intellectual property and enforce advance waivers for tortious conduct that are unique to the space. Corporate dealmaker Akselrud serves as legal advisor for Allied Management Group, co-founded by former NBCUniversal exec John Pollak and actor producer Wilmer Valderrama. He also led the teams handling the estate of Leonard Cohen’s catalog sale to Hipgnosis Song Management and Crooked Media’s financing deal with Soros Fund Management, and repped GoDigital Media Group in its acquisitions of Eastern Mountain Sports and Bob’s Stores and (with MEP Capital) Sound Royalties and NGL Collective. Additionally, Akselrud worked with Laffey as corporate counsel for Chamberlain Coffee in a financing round and YouTube duo Rhett & Link’s Mythical Entertainment in its joint ventures and investments.

If there’s a guild strike... “You might see a rise in audits by profit participants trying to recover income that that might be owed to them, or people looking at business ventures, like a coffee or alcohol brand or a restaurant,” says Rozansky.



The weaponization of social media allows people to go on whatever platform — Instagram, Twitter, etc. — and get an audience.”

Mitchell Schuster



Mitchell Schuster
Partner, Chair, Commercial Litigation
& Crisis Management

Stacey M. Ashby
Partner, Commercial Litigation
& Crisis Management

Kevin A. Fritz
Partner, Commercial Litigation
& Crisis Management

Kevin M. Hutzel
Associate, Crisis Management

Meister Seelig & Fein

By focusing on crisis management, Schuster, Ashby, Fritz and Hutzel help clients navigate everything from extortion and asset recovery to criminal charges and scandals. They’ve resolved cases for professional athletes facing criminal charges and helped high-profile, wealthy individuals deal with blackmailers. Always forefront in their minds: their clients — plaintiffs and defendants alike — are going through the worst experiences of their lives. That’s why they offer constant communication, support and follow-through even long after cases are resolved, Schuster says. Client confidentiality is a prior-

ity, so they don’t discuss specifics, but they are currently defending UTA in two New York State litigations and representing TikTok star Tayler Holder against sexual assault rumors.

People’s court: “The way people are meeting today through social media scares me a lot,” says Schuster. “The weaponization of social media allows people to go on whatever platform — Instagram, Twitter, etc. — and get an audience. And before you know it, you’re guilty until proven innocent, because the court of public opinion has turned against you. It’s really impossible to combat.”



Greg Akselrud reps Wilmer Valderrama, above.

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**Stanton "Larry" Stein**

Partner, Head, Media & Entertainment Group

Bennett A. Bigman

Partner

Ashley R. Yeargan

Partner

Erica S. Kim

Associate

Russ August & Kabat

The Russ August & Kabat team's practice has been in the news lately for han-

dling headline-making disputes for high-profile music industry figures. It's defending Drake in a trademark infringement suit by Conde Nast over his distribution of a Vogue magazine parody to promote his album "Her Loss," as well as in more than 150 suits filed against him over his guest appearance at Travis Scott's 2021 Astroworld concert. The team has also been repping Scott "Scooter" Braun and his companies in a variety of matters, including a \$50 million suit brought by former business partner Peter Comisar that reached a confidential settlement in late 2022, and Post Malone in four litigations, two of which have been dismissed on favorable terms. Other noteworthy clients include Simon Cowell and his Syco Entertainment (advising on "America's Got Talent"; negotiating his talent agreement for multiple NBC shows), plastic surgeon Dr. Arian Mowlavi (defamation suit against social media personality



The Russ August & Kabat team repped Post Malone in litigations.

Chalene Johnson), actor Rob Riggle (invasion of privacy suit against his ex-wife) and fashion stylist Cristina Ehrlich (suit by a disgruntled employee dismissed with prejudice).

Lawsuits of the future: "Technology is dictating most of where litigation is going," says Stein. "As A.I. rolls out, you'll have interesting issues of ownership and copyright."



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LAVELY & SINGER



Bryan Sullivan
Partner



Devin McRae
Partner

Early Sullivan Wright Gizer & McRae

Sullivan and McRae handle high-profile transactions and litigation, as well as crisis management. Sullivan has been repping attorney Kevin Morris in various legal matters since news broke about his friendship with Hunter Biden. His other clients include Miley Cyrus, Chaz Dean, Lionsgate and Enderby Entertainment (for whom he troubleshot Web 3.0 legal issues surrounding the NFT release of their movie “Zero Contact”). McRae is currently handling a suit by Kurt McLeod, who scripted the Ge-

rard Butler-starrer “Copshop,” against his former manager Mark Williams regarding the latter’s role as producer on the film, alleging breach of fiduciary duties and conflicts of interest; and Trina Venit’s domestic violence and coercive control suit against her estranged husband, former WME agent Adam Venit.

Hello, he lied: “Lawyers are heavily regulated for conflicts of interest, so when you see the stuff other professionals and fiduciaries are getting away with, it’s kind of mind-boggling,” says McRae.



Bryan Sullivan counts Miley Cyrus as a client.



Lawyers are heavily regulated for conflicts of interest, so when you see the stuff other professionals ... are getting away with, it’s kind of mind-boggling.”

— **Devin McRae**



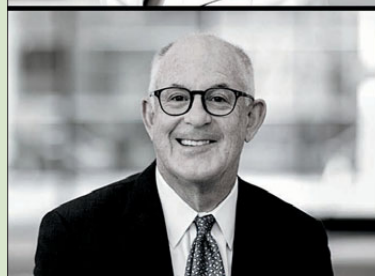
Michael E. Weinstein
Partner

Lavely & Singer

Weinstein reps entertainment executive Jeff Kwatinetz and his company Prospect Park in a trial against a rapper; Charlamagne tha God defending claims in litigation; and reality TV’s the Chrisley family in a contract breach

dispute against NBC (Todd and Julie Chrisley were separately convicted of fraud). The Century City-based litigator also counts Paris Hilton, Ellen DeGeneres and Elliot Page as clients.

In a fighting mood: Weinstein finds celebrities pushing back when slammed by demand letters from attorneys representing third parties seeking payments, in exchange for not exposing alleged celebrity wrongdoing. “We are seeing clients fighting back filing claims for civil extortion even when no money is paid,” he says. Weinstein adds that courts increasingly rule demand letters are not protected communications.



Congratulations to John Berlinski Julia Cherlow and Ron Nessim

on their recognition in Variety's 2023 Legal Impact Report

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Transactional



"X" star Mia Goth saw Michael Auerbach engineer her contract for the trilogy of films directed by Ti West.



Tom Ara
Partner, Global Co-Chair,
Media, Sports & Entertainment Sector

David Markman
Partner, Co-Chair,
Entertainment Transactions Practice

Robert J. Sherman
Partner Co-Chair,
Entertainment Finance Practice

Katherine Imp
Senior Associate

DLA Piper

Ara and Markman represented TikTok and its parent ByteDance in October for a multiyear virtual reality content production deal, and also a partnership with Viacom/MTV and

Pepsi launching an original MTV/TikTok show, "Becoming a Pop Star." Ara, Markman and Imp advised Pfizer in October using Marvel characters for the "Pfizer Everyday Heroes" campaign. Ara repped VVIP Ventures in its February acquisition of the National Enquirer, National Examiner and Globe magazines. Sherman repped music publisher Concord in December for a \$1.8 billion bond offering backed by Apollo. Sherman also worked for Concord acquiring music publishing and sound recording rights of Phil Collins, Genesis and others. Sherman was involved with three of 2022's top 10 music deals. Other clients include Apple TV+, Audible, CAA, media entrepreneur Jeanie Buss, City National Bank, CJ Entertainment and HarbourView Equity.

Round trip: Ara notes that windows segmentation was swept aside by video streaming, but is making a comeback. "The new windowing is tiering as we've seen in the advent of subscription VOD, FAST and AVOD," says Ara. Plus, there's another level of segmentation as the content offers on each tier also varies.



Michael Auerbach
Partner

Jackoway Austen Tyerman
Wertheimer Mandelbaum Morris
Bernstein Trattner & Klein

Auerbach has shown a knack for helping talent level up, closing Zach Cregger's ("Barbarian") multimillion-dollar deal to write and direct his second film, "Weapons," which went to New Line after an intense bidding war. He's also helped engineer career-changing contracts for actors Mia Goth (Ti West's "X" horror trilogy), Corey Hawkins ("The Color Purple"), Dylan Gelula (Kristoffer Borgli's film "Dreambird Scenario," starring Nicolas Cage) and Eiza González (Apple TV+ series "Extrapolations") and showrunner Tia Napolitano (CBS' "Fire Country").

Good luck, Al: "There is that inherent individualized value of a writer or director or actor's voice and presence that can't just be copied," he says.



Paul Bernstein
Chair, Entertainment Transactions

Kevin Ghassomian
Partner

Nick Jacobus
Partner

Nikki Kerman
Counsel

Venable

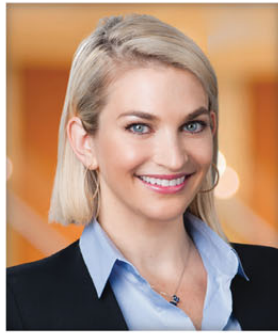
Bernstein and Jacobus rep management companies Entertainment 360 and Grandview; doc producer Boardwalk Pictures; and basketballer Stephen Curry's Unanimous Media. Bernstein also advised Black-owned Jesse Collins Entertainment receiving a minority investment in June. Ghassomian advises artists and talent, particularly in music, and high-net-worth individuals. Lately, he's been preparing music catalogs for sale by artist/owners amid booming prices for music publishing. Jacobus repped Tyra Banks for her SMiZE & Dream ice cream brand. Specializing in entertainment/media-led foundations and nonprofits, Kerman has repped the Archewell Foundation of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex since its inception and also served as legal counsel to the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media.

Caution: With the economy weakening, some clients "take a bird in the hand in the form of money off the table," says Bernstein. "Others invest, hoping to get two birds out of the bush." Kerman adds that cash is now king in philanthropy. "If you do have money, you can make much more impact in existing charities and projects that have lost money from other donors," she says.

Congratulations to
**Matt Galsor, Sally James,
Sky Moore**, and **Mark Muir**
for being named to *Variety's*
“Legal Impact Report.”



Matt Galsor



Sally James



Sky Moore



Mark Muir



GreenbergGlusker.com



Dan Black

Vice Chairman, Global Entertainment & Media Practice

Greenberg Traurig

Black represented showrunner/creator Lashan Browning in the first-of-its-kind deal where a woman of color majority-owns a production company financed by a major (Paramount Global in February). The Century City-based attorney also advised Carlyle Group-funded Litmus Music buying Keith Urban's music catalog in December; basketball's Golden State Warriors in Hollywood projects; and toy giant Spin Master in Hollywood. Black also advised executive employ-

ment and new-venture agreements in the past year providing \$100 million in guaranteed compensation.

Reality check: With Hollywood employers retrenching, Black feels that industry expectations "have to adapt to the new environment" such as cultivating back-end bonuses in lieu of fat upfront paydays. "It doesn't cast a pall over the business, but it reframes what the current reality is," he says.



Industry expectations 'have to adapt to the new environment.'

— Dan Black



Dan Black advised Litmus Music in its purchase of Keith Urban's catalog.

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DAMIEN GRANDERSON
ANDRÉ DES ROCHERS
ELIZABETH MOODY
& JOSH SANDLER

for their selection to *Variety's* 2023
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Carolyn Hunt
Film, Television and Digital Media



Jason Karlov
Music, Live Events and Sports



Bryan Thompson
Television, Digital Media and Financing



Scott Witlin
Entertainment Labor



Will Craver
Music, Live Events and Sports

MAKING AN IMPACT IN THE ENTERTAINMENT, MEDIA AND SPORTS ARENA

Barnes & Thornburg congratulates our own Carolyn Hunt, Jason Karlov, Bryan Thompson and Scott Witlin for their recognition in *Variety's* 2023 Legal Impact Report. We also applaud our own Will Craver for being noted in *Variety's* Up Next list. Cheers to you and all the honorees.

 **BARNES & THORNBURG LLP**

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Nancy Bruington
Corporate Partner

Kendall Johnson
Corporate Partner

Rick Offsay
Corporate Partner

Jonathan West
Corporate Partner

Latham & Watkins

Bruington and Johnson work ongoing

corporate, investment and employment matters for Blumhouse. Bruington and Offsay repped David Ellison's Skydance Media in finance initiatives, including a \$400 million injection in October. Bruington, who is finance-focused, repped A24 Films, upsizing its credit line to \$400 million a year ago. Johnson, who works the intersection of sports and entertainment, reps FIFA and U.S. Soccer for city selection by 2026 FIFA World Cup. Johnson and Offsay repped KKR-backed Mediawan investing in Brad Pitt-backed shingle Plan B in December. Offsay advised Skydance for its NFL sports-content venture in November and Carlyle Credit partnering in Litmus Music in August. West reps Tom Brady for endorsements and KKR on music catalog acquisitions. The transactional quartet is based in Century City. Other clients include incubator A-Frame Brands, social media D'Amelio Brands,

MGM, Monroe Capital, Ryan Seacrest, Searchlight Capital, Shamrock Capital Advisors, Silver Lake and Spotify.

Foreign exchange: On booming cross-border acquisitions of TV production companies, Offsay says that

"we anticipate the trend will continue." Buyers now want to hook up directly to talent. Offsay adds that transactions go in every direction: U.S. outfits prowl overseas and international companies plant their flags in Hollywood.



Tom Brady, who retired from the NFL earlier this year, is repped by Jonathan West.

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> 2023 LEGAL IMPACT REPORT

Jessica Marlow | Shaun Gordon | Tara Sattler | Jamie Lincenberg





Leif Cervantes de Reinstein
Partner

Shaun Clark
Partner

Robb Klein
Partner

Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton

The trio works for various Paramount Global units, including handling agreements for “Yellowstone” mega-producer Taylor Sheridan (“1923,” with

Harrison Ford). Cervantes de Reinstein, Clark and Klein are based in Century City. They also advise Sony Pictures businesses, including the reported \$350 million acquisition a year ago of unscripted producer Industrial Media. For client Fremantle last year, they worked the Angelina Jolie deal to write, direct and produce the film adaptation of “Without Blood” and separately co-produce with Showtime series “Fellow Travelers.” Other clients include content-slate financiers Ashland Hill Media Finance and separately PIPE Entertainment; eOne/Hasbro; HCLTech as digital transformation sponsor for MetLife Stadium in September; David Glasser-led 101 Studios, Hershey’s, QVC and Paul Lee’s Wiip assembling a film slate.

Indie angles: Indies need to find niche verticals to partner with their giant content buyers, says Cervantes de Reinstein, particularly as all-rights

deals upend traditional economics and library-building. Those verticals can be producing ancillary video games/virtual reality, administering complex music, e-commerce and shepherding under-the-radar indie talent to Hollywood giants. “We’re advising our clients to get very entrepreneurial so they can find different revenue streams,” he says.



Christopher Chatham
Partner

Manatt, Phelps & Phillips

Chatham has an enviable client list that includes Demi Moore, Heidi Klum, Kristen Bell and Dax Shepard,

Langley Prods. (“Cops”), writers/producers Luvh Rakhe (“New Girl,” “Dave”) and Nic Pizzolatto (“True Detective”), “ET” anchor Lauren Zima and Stage 29 Prods. (CBS’ “So Help Me Todd”). He recently repped Chris Harrison in the launch of his podcast “The Most Dramatic Podcast Ever... With Chris Harrison” and Next Century Spirits in its partnership with Seth MacFarlane on Bear Fight American Single Malt Whiskey and he’s positioning longtime client Dr. Phil McGraw for his next move, following the end of his show’s 21-season run.

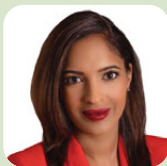


We’re advising our clients to get very entrepreneurial.”

— **Cervantes de Reinstein**

Congratulations to our partners **Jim Curry, Scott Edel, John Gatti, David Grossman, Wook Hwang, Arash Khalili** and **Paul Swanson** for being honored in the 2023 Legal Impact Report by *Variety*, as well as partner **Lauren Fried** for being featured in their “Up Next” list.



**Marcie Cleary**

Partner, Entertainment Grzoup

Frankfurt Kurnit

Cleary has been busy in the podcast space, negotiating a seven-figure multiyear sales pact with ad marketplace Gumball for clients Mandii B and Bridget Kelly and their show “See, the Thing Is” and deals for Warner Music Group’s new network Interval Presents, including a multiyear co-production/distribution partnership with iHeart Media. The Memphis native also harnessed her legal smarts and Southern charm to close deals for producer Charlie Alderman (Hulu series “Phony”) and

comic talent Jackie Fabulous (NBC series “Jackie’s Fabulous”), and writer Felicia Pride (Sony’s “Hitch 2”).

Most troubling trend: Cleary laments “the small number of comedy pilots that have been ordered. That’s unexpected and surprising.”

**Ethan Cohan**

Partner

Molly Stenson

Associate

**Del Shaw Moonves Tananka
Finkelstein Lezcano Bobb & Dang**

Cohan and Stenson represent over 20 production companies in the nonfiction space — their goal being to protect



When you’re looking at production company representation on the unscripted nonfiction side, every day is different.”

Ethan Cohan

their clients’ interests without interfering with their ability to tell stories in an entertaining way. Most notably, they represented Vox Media Studios in its first-of-a-kind deal with Netflix for the PGA documentary series “Full Swing.” Cohan and Stenson see it as their mission to help sports-focused productions strike a balance between telling stories that are genuine and fit their brands and ensuring their brands are protected and not exploited.

What a difference a day makes:

“When you’re looking at production company representation on the unscripted nonfiction side, every day is different,” Cohan says. “You could be doing a documentary about surfing one day, and the next day it’s about cupcakes. So you’ve really got to know how to protect the client in a multitude of different types of programming, subject matter and buyer requirements.”

Willkie congratulates

**Thomas Baxter, Alan Epstein, Sidney Fohrman,
Steven Hurdle, Michele Mulrooney and
Kathy Wunderli**

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Jeff Cohen
Co-Founder

Jonathan Gardner
Co-Founder

Bradley Garrett
Partner

Molly Fenton
Partner

Cohen Gardner

In the first year after launching their firm in 2002, finances were so tenuous that Cohen slept in their offices on the outskirts of Beverly Hills — a fact he kept secret from fellow co-founder Gardner. Today, the duo has a thriving practice at a better 90210 address. Garrett and Fenton became partners in 2015 and 2022, respectively. A former child actor, Cohen — one of the rare lawyers to receive a shout-out at the Oscars — played a key role in one of Hollywood's biggest feel-good success stories of the year, setting the deals for Michelle Yeoh and Ke Huy Quan's (who co-starred with his to-be attorney in 1985's "The Goonies") Oscar-winning roles in "Everything Everywhere All at Once." The firm also reps Bong Joon Ho (Warner Bros.' sci fi epic "Mickey 17," starring Robert Pattinson) and Ryan Coogler ("Black Panther: Wakanda Forever"); prodcos Proximity Media (Stephen Curry doc "Underrated" sale to Apple) and Castle Rock Entertainment (\$175 million relaunch of feature division); actor/comedians Little Rel Howery (Netflix sequel "Vacation Friends") and Ms. Pat (overall deal with BET); and author Gabrielle Zevin (bidding war for New York Times bestseller "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow").

Bringing back the backend: "When intellectual property has an advertising component and is being licensed off the original streamer, it's much easier to ask for profit participation," says Cohen.



Lindsay Conner
Partner

O'Melveny & Myers

Conner is known for making big deals (e.g., Beijing-based Perfect World's \$500 million Universal slate financing), and he's continued on pace since joining O'Melveny from Manatt, Phelps & Phillips in October 2021. In recent months, he's repped Disney/Marvel Studios in a 20-year name and likeness rights licensing deal with the estate of Stan Lee; ITV Studios America in its pact with Apple TV+ for the limited series "Franklin," starring Michael Douglas; and the streaming service Passionflix (run by Tosca Musk, sister of Elon) in a Series A investment round led by AMC Networks.

Repairing a rocky relationship: "We are starting to see more Chinese releases of Hollywood content, but, at the end of the day, the film business can't beat world politics when things get really frosty," he says.



Robert A. Darwell
Senior Partner, Head of Global Media

Ramela Ohanian
Senior Associate

Jeffrey D. Watkins
Associate

Keith Kelly
Associate

Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton

The quartet served as production counsel for the second season of Amazon Studios' "The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power" for talent and special effects contracts, plus transitioning production to the U.K. from New Zealand. The Century City-based Darwell, Ohanian, Watkins and Kelly worked Amazon Stu-



dios concerts/music specials in the past year: Kendrick Lamar's the Big Steppers Tour performing in Paris, Tyler the Creator's Call Me If You Get Lost Tour show in Los Angeles and The Weeknd's the Dawn FM Experience immersive music special. The four also advise Meta Platforms (formerly Facebook) for metaverse initiatives involving celebrities, music and sponsorships, including Sean Combs' BET Lifetime Achievement Awards party. They rep Argentine musician Paulo Londra, including his Anheuser-Busch pact for an official Spanish-language song for the 2022 World Cup. Other clients include NBCUniversal, Nickelodeon, TelevisaUnivision launching its streaming service, Viacom Latin America and podcaster Wondery. Outside of his day job, Darwell made the documentary "The 90s Club," combating ageism.

Going large: While video streamers are canceling some greenlighted productions and jettisoning midlevel original films, Darwell sees a "shift to bigger-budget movies that suggests a trend of quality and spectacle over quantity." Previously streamers emphasized breadth/volume of content, Darwell says.



Ethan Cohan and Molly Stenson worked the Vox Media pact for "Full Swing," which streams on Netflix.


Kenneth Deutsch

Partner, Global Co-Chair,
Entertainment, Sports & Media Practice

Latham & Watkins

In March, Deutsch worked for Charles D. King-led Macro in raising \$90 million in minority investments from several institutional heavy-hitters like BlackRock Alternatives. The Century City-based attorney also administers Brian Oliver's New Republic Pictures ("Top Gun: Maverick") for its multi-picture co-finance and distribution pact with Paramount, and Content Partners for ongoing library/participations acquisitions. Other clients include Anonymous Content, City Hill Arts, Jon Favreau/Golem Creations,

Morgan Freeman's Revelations Entertainment, Bruna Papandrea's Made Up Stories, Jeff Skoll's Participant Media and Stampede Entertainment.

Still percolating: Though the economic slowdown fuels overall pessimism, Deutsch says overseas strategic players and institutions still invest in Hollywood: "Companies that can shape culture with their content or brands and cut through all the noise remain highly attractive."



Companies that can shape culture with their content or brands and cut through all the noise remain highly attractive."

Kenneth Deutsch



Sheppard Mullin worked Amazon Studios' Kendrick Lamar concert special.

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Darrell D. Miller



Marc H. Simon

**Scott Edel**

Chair, Entertainment Practice

Arash KhaliliCo-Chair, Corporate,
Capital Markets & Sports Practice**Paul Swanson**

Chair, Entertainment Finance Practice

Loeb & LoebLoeb & Loeb has a transactional
entertainment practice befitting the
124-year-old firm's impressive size

Scott Edel handled Nexon's investment in Anthony and Joe Russo's AGBO.

and reputation. In recent months, Edel handled deals for Alcon Entertainment (Amazon's "Blade Runner 2099" sequel; animated "Garfield" feature), video game maker Nexon Studios (\$400 million minority investment in Anthony & Joe Russo's AGBO)

and numerous other content and game producers, including Studio 8, Black Label Media, Google/YouTube, BuzzFeed, Nintendo, Games Workshop and Valve Corp. Khalili's deals include repping Vin Di Bona Prods. ("America's Funniest Home Videos") and

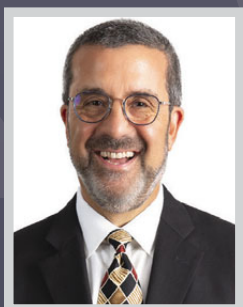
its studio FishBowl WorldWide Media in their majority stake sale to an investor group led by Clarion Capital Partners; NBA star Chet Holmgren in several endorsement deals; and Annapurna Pictures and Annapurna Games in various matters. Swanson advises Non-Fungible Films in its corporate restructuring and agreements related to NFTs and their exploitation in film and TV projects, as well as numerous entities (including MUFG Bank, Cast & Crew Financial Services, Aperture Media Partners, City National Bank and Comerica Bank) on their term loan credit facilities.

Playing for keeps: "With every iteration of a [video] game, you have this incredible relationship with your consumers that continues to pay dividends, whereas for a film or television series, it's much more limited," says Edel.

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our partners and all of *Variety's* 2023
"Legal Impact Report" honorees.



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ATTORNEYS

**Alan Epstein**

Chair, Entertainment Transactions

**Sidney "Sid" Fohrman**

Chair, Music & Digital Media

**Thomas Baxter**

Partner

**Steven "Steve" Hurdle**

Partner

Willkie Farr & Gallagher

This quartet possesses vast experience across all areas of entertainment law. In March, Epstein closed a "doozy" of a deal when representing Ryan Reynolds in T-Mobile's reported \$1.35 billion acquisition of low-cost carrier Mint Mobile. Reynolds purchased an ownership stake in Mint in 2019. Epstein also advised Brad Pitt's Plan B Entertainment in Mediawan's acquisition of a significant stake in Plan B. Fohrman's expertise in tech, music and new media spans from advising BMG Rights Management on catalog acquisitions to negotiating deals and agreements for virtual reality music company AmazeVR. Baxter advised producer Chris Coelen in selling an interest in Kinetic Content to North Road. Hurdle recently represented Venture 10 Studio Group principals John Stevens and Hans Schiff in rolling the Group into the newly formed Vio Entertainment.

On the horizon: "It's hard to predict what the year is going to look like until the WGA disputes get resolved," Epstein says, "but one of the things I'm expecting is, despite the strong economic headwinds and the increase in interest rates, we'll continue to see strong interest in premium content creators across all genres. The power of premium content is prevalent and is surviving the downturn ... It's probably even more powerful today than ever because of the increasing volume of content being consumed."

**Matt Galsor**

Partner

**Sky Moore**

Partner

Sally James

Partner

**Mark Muir**

Partner

Greenberg Glusker

The clients repped by the Greenberg Glusker team includes some of the biggest names in movies and television, in front of and behind the camera. Galsor's stable includes actors Tom Cruise, Chris Hemsworth and Vin Diesel, directors James Cameron, David Fincher and Anthony & Joe Russo, Ubisoft Entertainment and the estate of J.R.R. Tolkien. James specializes in corporate financing, including HighPost Capital's acquisition of Hemsworth's fitness app Centr and its reorganization with Inspire Fitness. She's also handled numerous deals for actors Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje (Netflix's "Our Man from Jersey") and Showtime's "King Shaka") and Alice Braga (co-starring role "Hypnotic") and smartphone video subscription service Scribr. Muir reps producer Marc Evans ("The Old Guard 2" and "The Mother" for Netflix), producer Dan Farah ("Ready Player One" sequel) and author Ernie Cline, and works alongside Galsor on Cruise- and Hemsworth-related matters. Moore crafts deals for media companies including Cross Creek Pictures (sale of animated film "Ladybug & Cat Noir: The Movie" to Netflix) and Gravititas Ventures (sale to Anthem Media). **The two-minute AI script polish:** "It may come one day, and if it can give you something usable that you can start with, the power of that would be so overwhelming that no contract, no guild agreement will stop people from doing it," says Galsor.



Matt Galsor's clients include Tom Cruise, whose "Top Gun: Maverick" scored blockbuster B.O.

**Eric Geffner**

Partner

**Rusty Weiss**

Partner

**Emily Zipperstein**

Partner

**Evie Whiting**

Counsel

Sidley Austin

The quartet provides ongoing advice to Eldridge Industries for its acquisition of the Golden Globes, and to AT&T in carriage deals for Warner Bros. Discovery streamers. Geffner works entertainment/sports; Weiss, licensing; Zipperstein founder-led initiatives and beauty products fre-

quently in entertainment; and Whiting entertainment/sports. The four transactional attorneys further rep Live Nation for ongoing joint ventures/acquisitions, and separately three music companies making acquisitions in the high-nine figures. They advise Dwayne Johnson, Dany Garcia and their Seven Bucks Companies, including licensing XFL's media rights to Disney in May. In sports, clients include Jeff Skoll for his November minority investment in Washington, D.C.'s Monumental Sports & Entertainment; a lender providing eight-figure financing in May to a Formula 1 event; and women's soccer Kansas City Current, including its \$117 million stadium project. Other clients include Arctos Sports Partners, podcaster Audio Up in a financing round, soccer's CONCACAF, Hasbro and Spyglass Media. **Circling back:** With merger-mania ebbing, Whiting expects that companies that aimed for M&As will instead return to debt financing as they go it alone. They will "start going back to the financing market and be really deliberate and thoughtful about how to build robust, meaningful partnerships," Whiting says.



Gregg Gellman
Named Partner



Jeff Endlich
Named Partner



David Krintzman
Named Partner



Ryan Goodell
Partner

**Yorn Levine Barnes
Krintzman Rubenstein Kohner
Endlich & Gellman**

The Yorn Levine team's practice encompasses top creators, film and TV talent, recording artists and athletes. Gellman's clients include top-grossing stand-up comic Sebastian Maniscalco, for whom he negotiated deals with Lionsgate to co-write and star alongside Robert De Niro in the film "About My Father" and with HBO Max to be the lead in the series "How to Be a Bookie," scripted by Chuck Lorre. Krintzman closed an overall deal for showrunner Dan Levy with Netflix that covers "Good Grief," a feature Levy starred in, directed, wrote and produced, and a pact with HBO Max for the unscripted show "Big Brunch," which Levy created and hosted. Endlich closed an overall feature pact with Universal for clients Daniel Scheinert and Daniel Kwan (aka "The Daniels"), who won a trio of Oscars for writing, directing and producing "Everything Everywhere All at Once." Goodell recently closed deals for Jennifer Kaytin Robinson (co-writer of "Thor: Love and Thunder") to direct a reboot of "I Know What You Did Last Summer" and write a yet-to-be-announced tentpole film for Disney.

Potential strike stress and strategic choices: "A client may choose one opportunity over another or take it up to now as opposed to waiting for perhaps another one that might come in a little time," says Gellman.



Michael S. Gendler
Partner



Kevin M. Kelly
Partner

Sarah M. Cunningham
Partner

Gendler & Kelly

Gendler, Kelly and Cunningham repped Meryl Streep for Disney-produced "Only Murders in the Building" and also a new overall Disney deal in May for exec producer John Hoffman of the same show that he co-created. The trio also advised Shonda Rhimes and her Shondaland company for Netflix series "Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story." Other clients include David E. Kelley for the "Presumed Innocent" limited series for Apple TV+; and Chris Pine for his directorial debut, producing and co-writing heist film "Poolman"; and separately acting for "Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves" at Paramount Pictures.

Eyes on the horizon: Cunningham says that fast-paced changes in the media landscape require future-proofing deals. In transactions with studios and producers, content can land at traditional media or streamers, she says, adding that advertising-support tiers are a new wrinkle within the streamer silo. That is a big fork in the road when streamers order just six to 10 episodes a season versus 22 segments, which is the norm for legacy platforms. "I don't know if we're in a period of flux or this is the new normal," Cunningham says.



Today's production decisions were made, in many cases, quite a while ago, but studios are going to be more selective going forward."

Lev Ginsburg



Lev Ginsburg and Grace Kallis' client Clea DuVall has several projects on her slate.



Lev Ginsburg
Partner



Grace Kallis
Partner

Ginsburg Daniels Kallis

The fruits of Ginsburg and Kallis' deal-making were in the news as clients Timothée Chalamet traversed the

globe shooting "Wonka" and sequel "Dune: Part 2" for Warner Bros., and writer/director J.D. Dillard garnered acclaim for Sony's "Devotion," about the U.S. Navy's first Black fighter pilot. The duo's work also made headlines via client deals for Oscar-nominated actor LaKeith Stanfield (Legendary's biblical epic "Book of Clarence"), Clea DuVall (as creator/EP of series "Housebroken" and "High School" and a cast member of "Poker Face") and "House of the Dragon" writer/EP Sara Hess in a new overall deal with HBO.

Aftermath of streaming war retreat: "Today's production decisions were made, in many cases, quite a while ago, but studios are going to be more selective going forward," says Ginsburg. "Backends are hard to envision under today's streaming models unless/until the content starts to migrate outside their walled gardens on any reasonable timetable."



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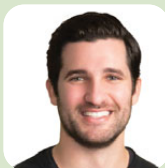
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Shaun Gordon
Partner



Jessica Marlow
Partner



Tara Sattler
Partner



Jamie Lincenberg
Associate

Weintraub Tobin

The Weintraub Tobin team has established itself as a key player in the

podcast space, establishing new deal frameworks and industry standards. Gordon cut a first-of-its-kind licensing deal for Guy Raz with NPR and Wondery/Amazon for the podcast “How I Built This,” a podcast-to-television deal for Melissa Moore’s “Happy Face” with CBS and a podcast-to-film deal for Sonoro’s “Toxicomanía” with Paramount. He also reps numerous other podcast creators and producers, including Alex Goldman (“Reply All”), At Will Media (“Wild Things”), Treefort Media (“Killer Psyche”), Tiffany Reese (“Something Was Wrong”), Western Sound (“Lost Hills”), Denzel Dion (“We Said What We Said”) and Matthew Derby (“Sandra”). Marlow’s clients include podcasters Claudia and Jackie Oshry (“The Toast”) and Remi Cruz, whose show “Pretty Basic” spawned a live tour and a cosmetics collaboration with Tarte. Sattler has been advising on the launch of multi-platform

mental health-oriented Wondermind and Sugar23. Lincenberg focuses on repping podcast on-air talent, including host/creator Eileen Kelly (“Going Mental,” produced by Dear Media) and Jessica Ambrose (former co-host of “Chatty Broads”). She and Marlow rep Danielle Carolan and Brooke Miccio,

hosts of “Gals on the Go,” produced by PodcastOne.

Making podcasts more discoverable: “If the Spotifys, the YouTubes and the Apples of the world can crack that algorithm, then I think you’ll see a really exciting period for podcasts,” says Gordon.



Jessica Marlow client Remi Cruz saw her podcast spawn a live tour and cosmetics collab.

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Congratulations to
Eugene Pikulin

on his inclusion in *Variety*’s 2023
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Damien Granderson
Partner

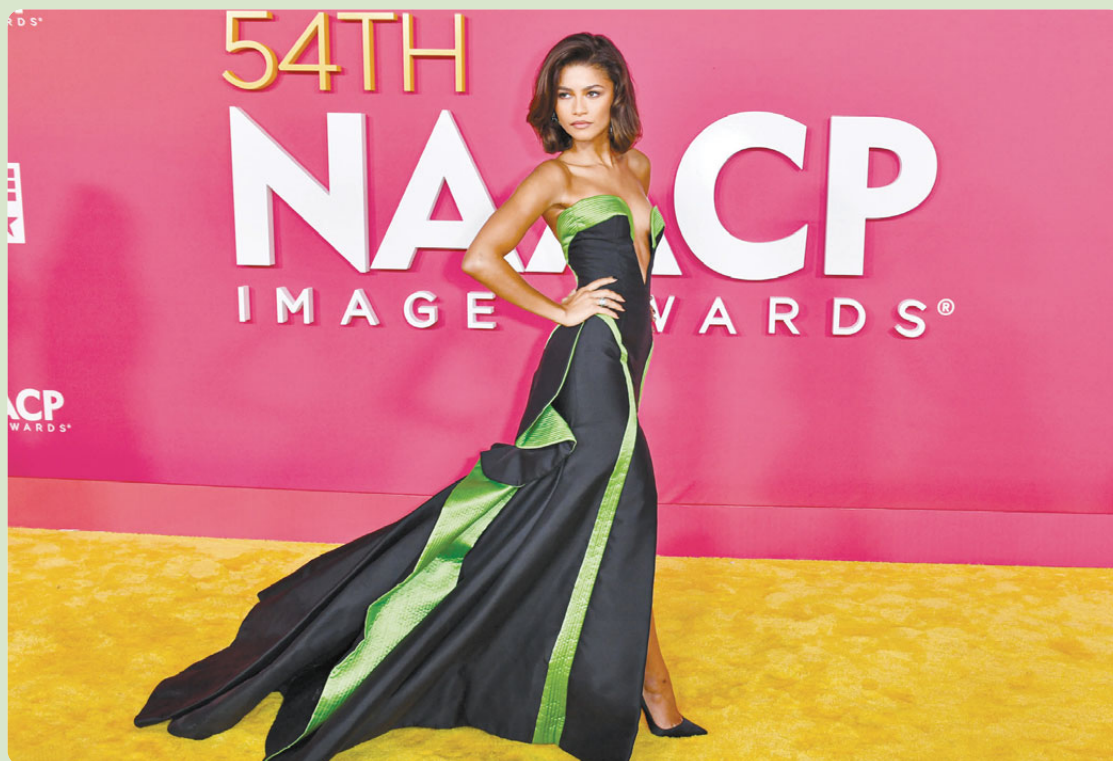
André Des Rochers
Partner

Josh Sandler
Partner

Elizabeth Moody
Partner, Chair, New Media Group

Granderson Des Rochers

Granderson Des Rochers' practice spans everything from movies to smart rowing machines. Granderson cut big deals for his stable of music clients, including Nicky Minaj's pact to bring her show "Queen Radio" to Amazon's Amp app and J. Balvin's endorsements of Brand Jordan and Tiffany & Co., as well as the confidential sale of several recording and publishing catalogs. Des Rochers has helped guide the career of Zendaya, setting her to star in and produce the MGM drama "Challengers," and inked deals for directors Reinhold Marcus Green (Paramount's Bob Marley biopic) and Blitz Bazawule (musical film adaptation of "The Color Purple") and "Everything Everywhere All at Once" producer Jonathan Wang's overall pact with Universal. Moody advises clients in the tech space on music rights issues, including gaming company Roblox, virtual concert start-up Wave XR and numerous exercise platforms, including Hydrow, Liteboxer and FitXR. Sandler is a force in the comedy world, cutting deals for clients including Pete Davidson (Peacock series "Bupkis") and Phoebe Robinson (extension of overall with ABC Signature). **Show us the data, streamers:** "It feels disingenuous for them to get on the phone with talent reps and argue that they shouldn't participate in any success because they're not going to share information regarding success," says Des Rochers.



André Des Rochers has helped guide the career of Zendaya, here at the NAACP Image Awards in February.



Peter E. Grant
Partner

Grubman Shire Meiselas & Sacks

Grant repped Lady Gaga starring in Warner's upcoming sequel "Joker: Folie à Deux." He also worked Ana de Armas' deals for movies "Ghosted" that wrapped at Apple TV+ in May and "Ballerina" for Lionsgate in October. Grant also advises Robert De Niro, including for "Wise Guys" at Warner Bros. in August. Additionally, he reps ex-HBO topper Richard Plepler/Eden Prods., including with Apple TV+ for a Benjamin Franklin bio-series starring Michael Douglas; and also advises David Letterman/Worldwide Pants. **Stacking gigs:** With limited TV series in vogue, Grant notes that means fewer hit-the-jackpot jobs on series that provide steady work and pay raises. As a result, Grant negotiates narrower talent exclusivity in talent employment contracts "so clients can take on multiple jobs."



Ellie Heisler
Partner

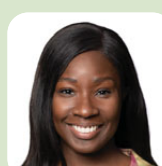
Carron Joan Mitchell
Partner

Christina Chang
Counsel

Farrah Usmani
Counsel

Nixon Peabody

Last year Nixon Peabody's entertainment team — who are all women — generated an aggregate value of over \$500 million by negotiating fiercely on behalf of roughly 100 clients. Chang and Heisler are entertainment attorneys, while Mitchell and Usmani focus primarily on the music business; the four collabo-



rate frequently for multihyphenate clients. Heisler calls the value of model-actress Emily Ratajowski's podcast deal — "High Low With EmRata" — "significant," but more importantly, it extends her client's voice well beyond a previous book deal. Building longevity for clients' careers is paramount, as evidenced by Mitchell's efforts for longtime client, recording artist Brent Faiyaz. Usmani represented Outback in securing the rights to produce and promote Puerto Rican chart-topper Rauw Alejandro's 2023 world tour. For the 360 Agency, Chang negotiated and drafted all talent and vendor agreements for AT&T's "Dream in Black" campaigns and master service agreements for campaigns and initiatives for the Environmental Defense Fund and Ready Finance.

EQ power: Focusing on emotional intelligence, also termed emotional quotient, Heisler says being a young woman who's had to work hard to succeed is an asset. Personally, "it comes from being a woman as well as a first-generation American. There's a work ethic we have because nothing was given to us or guaranteed."



David M. Hernand
Partner, Chair, Century City office

Mickey Mayerson
Partner, Co-Chair,
Global Entertainment & Media Finance

Susan Williams
Partner, Co-Chair,
Global Entertainment & Media Finance

Sean A. Monroe
Partner, Entertainment & Media

Craig Emanuel
Partner, Entertainment & Media

Paul Hastings
Hernand advised private equity Clarion Capital purchasing Vin Di Bona Prods. (“America’s Funniest Home

Videos”) in January. Hernand and Monroe repped Paramount Global and Warner Bros. Discovery selling 75% of the CW Network in August. For production company Indian Paintbrush, Mayerson worked a distribution deal for Wes Anderson’s “Asteroid City” to Focus Features in June. Mayerson also advised Nashville-based film/television producer PZAJ in a first-look deal with 101 Studios in June. Williams advised Black Bear Pictures launching its international distribution and sales operations in May, and also financier 777 Partners providing funds to Najafi Companies for its purchase of STX Entertainment in April 2022. Monroe advised metaverse/new media financier Game Fund Partners Group investing in Discord in January. Other clients of the Century City-based attorneys include Fox Corp., Paramount Global, Warner Bros. Discovery and Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith’s Westbrook. Emanuel, another major player in Paul Hastings’ transactional team, is Variety’s 2023 Power of Law Honoree. Emanuel’s heady client roster includes uber-showrunner Ryan Murphy, Tom Hanks and his production company Playtone, Robert Rodriguez, MSG Entertainment, Tony Gilroy, Mandalay Pictures and Cirque du Soleil. *Variety* is honoring him for his distinguished career and his philanthropic endeavors, which include

the Faith & Politics Institute and the March on Washington Film Festival.

Show me the money: With streamers moving away from growth at any cost, Hernand expects to see an embrace of slate financing partnerships to keep up content output while also helping reach increasingly urgent profitability ambitions. “We expect that studios will start to look to lay off content financing risk to third parties,” Hernand says.



Briana Hill
Partner, Co-Chair,
Media + Entertainment Practice

Simon Pulman
Partner, Co-Chair,
Media + Entertainment Practice

Pryor Cashman

Hill and Pulman, based in Los Angeles and New York City, respectively, joined Pryor Cashman from Cowan DeBaets, Abrahams & Sheppard in February to lead the firm’s media and entertainment practice with James Janowitz. In recent months, they’ve jointly negotiated deals for the production companies Sister (including deals to for a TV adapta-

tion of Alaina Urquhart’s book “The Butcher & The Wren” with Jennifer Yale as showrunner, and an upcoming 9/11 series written by Tobias Lindholm and starring Jeremy Strong) and Blumhouse (acquisitions of Sundance hit “Nanny” and novella “Blind Spot” for a streaming feature adaptation for its Amazon output deal). Additionally, they handled business and legal affairs for prodcos Wiip and 88 Rising, and numerous videogame film and TV adaptations, including DJ2’s (“Sonic the Hedgehog” and “Tomb Raider”) first look deal with Amazon.

Everything always flux all at once: “It just depends on whether things are in a faster cycle, a slower cycle and how much awareness people have of what’s happening,” says Hill.



We expect that studios will start to look to lay off content financing risk to third parties.”

— **David M. Hernand**



Mickey Mayerson worked on a distribution deal for Wes Anderson’s “Asteroid City” to Focus Features.



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**Jason Karlov**

Partner, Chair,
Entertainment, Sports & Media Practice Group

Carolyn Hunt

Partner

Bryan Thompson

Partner

Scott Witlin

Partner

[Barnes & Thornburg](#)

Karlov reps the NFL as well as NFL Network in entertainment matters, Bob Dylan, John Fogerty and Ionic Recordings. He works music, television, film, live events, advertising, licensing and technology industries. Hunt advises City National Bank, Hercules Films, Highland Films and Lionsgate Entertainment. She is focused on media finance and entertainment transactions, including capital raisings, slate financing, credit lines, foreign incentive benefits and co-productions. Thompson's clients include feature-length documentary "Gabby Giffords Won't Back Down"; Lisa Erspamer/Erspamer Prods.; Peyton Manning and Omaha Prods., including its sports TV program and podcasting deals; and TV One for development, production and distribution matters. Working labor and employment matters, Witlin advises a group of independent theatrical

film producers negotiating the Low Budget Theatrical Agreement with the IATSE union. Other Witlin clients include Sony Interactive Entertainment, the Los Angeles Lakers and content company Keshet Intl. The quartet is based in Century City.

Pushing the boundaries: Karlov notes that the music industry thrives on risk taking. "That's always been the case, but it's now on steroids" because of the digital revolution, Karlov says. "In so doing, the music business also pushes the limits of the law."



You're doing shows that are six to eight episodes with longer hiatuses, so you don't want to be stuck where you can't be a series regular on another show unless you have the studio's permission."

— **Jared Levine**

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Jason Karlov handles the NFL Network, which produces such popular shows as "Good Morning Football."



Jared Levine
Named Partner

Yorn Levine Barnes Krintzman
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Levine signed "Squid Game" creator, writer-director and exec producer Hwang Dong-hyuk and exec producer Kim Ji-yeon last year and negotiated a nine-figure deal (with partners Kevin Yorn and Gregg Gellman) for the duo to produce additional seasons of the show for Netflix. He's also closed a nine-figure pact with Warner Bros. Television for "Ted Lasso" co-creator Bill Lawrence, handled matters for Stephen Curry and Erick Peyton's Unanimous Media, and inked contract extensions for Colin Jost at "Saturday Night Live" and for his overall TV development deal at Universal.

Fighting studio exclusivity clauses: "You're doing shows that are six to eight episodes with longer hiatuses, so you don't want to be stuck where you can't be a series regular on another show unless you have the studio's permission."



Ryan Levine
Partner

Jackoway Austen Tyerman
Wertheimer Mandelbaum Morris
Bernstein Trattner & Klein

LeVine uses creative problem solving to get the best possible deals for clients, including Oscar-winners Octavia Spencer (first-look scripted pact for her production outfit Orit Entertainment with Skydance TV) and

Ariana DeBose ("House of Spoils"). In recent months, he's also set roles for Mike Faist (the tennis drama "Challengers"), William Jackson Harper ("Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania"), Jacob Tremblay ("Cold Copy," "Skeleton Tree," "Queen of Bones") and Fred Hechinger ("Hell of a Summer," "Kraven the Hunter," "The Nickel Boys," "Thelma").

Potential for strikes: "I'm optimistic that both sides will look at the economic climate and come to a compromise soon, but I'm also a realist and I fear the same issues could cause them to become more entrenched," LeVine says.



Linda Lichter
Partner

Lichter Grossman Nichols
Adler Feldman & Clark

Lichter's status as an accomplished four-and-a-half-decade veteran gives her special privileges, like the opportunity to renegotiate the renewal of the domestic copyright for screenwriters of a major studio franchise that she first sold as a spec script for the pair back in the mid '80s. It also enabled her to cut big deals for a long list of high-profile clients, including directors Marc Forster (set to helm Disney's "The Graveyard Book"); Chloé Zhao (Oscar-winner for "Nomadland"); and DGA president Lesli Linka Glatter (upcoming Netflix limited series "Zero Day," starring Robert De Niro).

Anxious times: "One of the reasons I wanted to be in the business is that it changed so fast, so there was always something new to learn, but I feel like we're heading into an area of conflict," she says.



One of the reasons I wanted to be in the business is that it changed so fast. There was always something new to learn."

Linda Lichter



Barry Littman repped the showrunners of "The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power."



Barry Littman

Attorney at Law

Hansen, Jacobson, Teller, Hoberman, Newman, Warren, Richman, Rush, Kaller, Gellman, Meigs & Fox

Having negotiated screenwriting team J.D. Payne and Patrick McKay's groundbreaking deal as showrunners for Amazon's "Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power," despite their thin experience in television, Littman successfully re-negotiated their Season 2 contract before the first season had even premiered. He also negotiated Christopher Columbus' first television overall deal (with Disney Television), and recently struck seven-figure-plus deals for creators and

producers Akiva Goldsman, Shannon Burke, Mimi Leder, Abe Forsythe, and Craig Pearce.

Labor of love: "There's a lot of satisfaction that comes with working with young talent and people working their way up," he says. "You really have to push, but they're the ones who need protection. They're the ones who need someone advocating to move them up, financially and legally, and help them get to that place in their life."



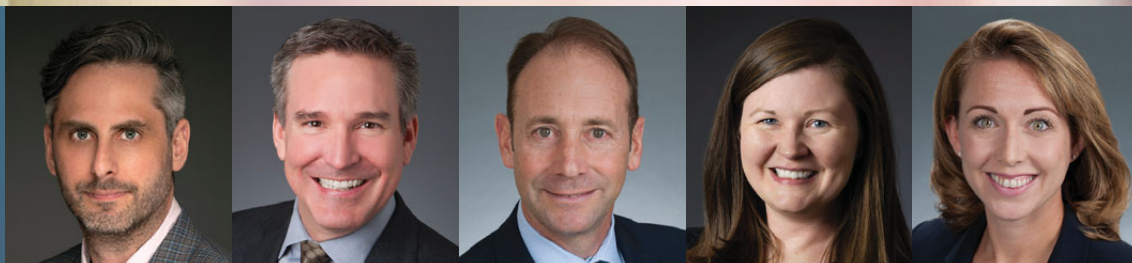
There's a lot of satisfaction that comes with working with young talent."

— Barry Littman

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**Derek Ludwin**

Partner, Co-Chair, Sports Industry Group,
Co-Chair, Antitrust Litigation Practice Group

Adrian Perry

Partner, Co-Chair, Entertainment & Media
Industry Group, Co-Chair, Music Industry Group

Robyn Polashuk

Partner, Co-Chair,
Entertainment & Media Industry Group

Michael Hill

Special Counsel

Covington & Burling

Ludwin advised Discovery on global regulatory issues in acquiring Warner Media in April 2022; and Ludwin and Hill repped the NFL for its for Google/YouTube rights pact in December. Perry repped Universal Music for various NFT deals; and he advised A+E Networks in its Range Media Partners deal a year ago. Polashuk repped Disney and ESPN Media Networks in their complex DISH Network/Sling carriage deal in November. Hill advised Major League Soccer for its global 10-year Apple deal in June; MLS again in December for its four-year Fox and Univision U.S. TV agreements and TSN for Canada; and the Los Angeles Clippers launching direct-to-consumer ClipperVision. Ludwin is based in Washington, D.C.; Perry and Hill are in New York; and Polashuk is in Century City.

Media maze: Polashuk expects bundling and packaging innovations as digital media mushrooms; for example, video-streamed sports join the mix. Bundles will be “based on people’s interests,” Polashuk says. “I think that there are a lot of options now but they are hard to navigate.” To corral consumers, Perry says that digital media platforms will introduce new wrinkles like “gamified ancillary content and metaverse activities to keep people in the same ecosystem. It’s getting competitive for eyeballs.”



Darrell Miller reps Angela Bassett as well as her shingle, Bassett Vance Prods.

**Kevin Masuda**

Partner, Co-Chair, Media, Entertainment
& Technology Practice Group

Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher

Masuda advised NFL football investing in Skydance Sports as a multi-sport production studio in November, and separately commentator Rachel Maddow in creating her production company with its Amblin Entertainment movie deal. The Los Angeles-based attorney also repped Klutch Athletics in its strategic partnership with New Balance, and an affiliate of SNB Capital in July buying a minority stake in the Russo brothers’ shingle AGBO. Other clients include LeBron James’ SpringHill Entertainment and Michael Eisner’s Tornante Company.

Unconventional: Masuda marvels that the digital revolution constantly upends industry norms. For example, rigid running times have become lax. “Now I have clients with shows that are just 15 minute long,” he says. Masuda believes that upheaval affords more creative control.

**Darrell D. Miller**

Partner, Founding Chair,
Entertainment & Sports Law Dept.

Fox Rothschild

Miller repped Angela Bassett in April to star in Netflix film “Damsel” as well as Bassett Vance Prods., the company Bassett runs with her husband, Courtney B. Vance, in re-upping at Viacom Studios/CBS, whose MTV Studios greenlit the shingle’s “Heist 88.” Other clients include Da’Vine Joy Randolph for HBO series “The Idol” and Lionsgate film “Shadow Force”; Taylor Tomlinson for high-rated “Look at You” Netflix comedy special; and Reginald Hudlin directing Eddie Murphy in Amazon’s “Candy Cane Lane.”

Futureproofing: With the media landscape quickly shifting, Miller feels that dealmaking needs to anticipate what’s around the corner. “The most successful artists and brands of today can’t just talk about what I call the immediate deal, but also how that immediate deal needs to drive multiple revenue streams,” he says.

**Michele Mulrooney**

Chair, West Coast Private Clients Group

Kathy Wunderli

Partner

Willkie Farr & Gallagher

Mulrooney and Wunderli have worked together for 15 years, providing confidential personal legal services to high-wealth clients, many of whom are in the entertainment industry. Their work spans life events from birth to death, including taxes, marriage/co-habitation agreements and dissolutions, estate planning, probate, philanthropy and more. In the past year, that’s involved collaborating with their counterparts in the U.K., Europe, China and Canada. Discretion and privacy are paramount. Mulrooney and Wunderli never name their clients, though it is well known in the entertainment community that they rep many of the A-listers.

Taxing concerns: Proposed wealth taxes aren’t the only thing worrying clients. “Our current estate and gift tax exemptions are scheduled to basically be cut in half in 2026,” Wunderli says. “What’s on the minds of our clients is how can they use their existing estate and gift tax exemption before it sunsets. People with wealth are thinking, ‘What planning can I do in the next two years to maximize what I can pass on to my family, and charitable giving as well?’”



Now I have clients with shows that are just 15 minutes long.”

Kevin Masuda

**Julie Murray**

Partner, Entertainment Group

Victoria Cook

Partner, Entertainment Group

Melissa Georges

Partner, Entertainment Group

Dionne Gordon

Counsel, Entertainment Group

Frankfurt Kurnit Klein & Selz

The quartet of Murray, Cook, Georges and Gordon leads the nonfiction

group at Frankfurt Kurnit, which did over \$100 million in deals in 2022 and advised on over 500 hours of content. Cook's clients include Liz Garbus, Dan Cogan and their production shingle Story Syndicate, producers of the Netflix docuseries "Harry and Meghan," which amassed more than 1.69 billion minutes of viewing time in its first week alone, and Andrew Rossi, director and producer of Netflix docuseries "The Andy Warhol Diaries." Georges provided legal counsel, content review and vetting on the latter show and does ongoing work on Apple TV+'s "The Problem With Jon Stewart" and Discovery ID's "On the Case With Paula Zahn." Murray repped prodco MakeMake on director Elvis Mitchell's Netflix doc "Is That Black Enough for You?" and Jupiter Entertainment on the Discovery ID series "In Pursuit With John Walsh," while Gordon handled legal

counsel and vetting. Other recent projects include Netflix's "White Hot: The Rise and Fall of Abercrombie & Fitch" (Cook/Georges), "Somebody Feed Phil" (Murray/Georges), "Descendant" (Cook) and Heidi

Ewing's Sony feature "I Carry You With Me."

Additional distribution windows staying shut in doc space: "Nine times out of 10, the buyers still want full 100% global rights," says Murray.



Nine times out of 10, the buyers still want full 100% global rights."

— **Julie Murray**

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 and would like to congratulate all recipients on this recognition.

**ELSA RAMO****MICHELLE CHANG****ERIKA CANCHOLA**

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Richard S. Petretti
Partner

DLA Piper

A Hollywood finance specialist, Petretti advised City National Bank on various music transactions. He also repped JPMorgan in financings for multiple theatrical and streaming projects, and Truist Bank, including amending a credit agreement. He supports various mergers and acquisitions transactions working financing matters, such as intercreditor issues. Petretti joined in December from another law firm.

Fuzzy line: Noting that the copyright office said it won't register artificial intelligence-created content, Petretti muses about potential uncertainty. "At what point does the AI go beyond being merely a tool to actually being the creator of a work, so as to render content ineligible for protection under current copyright law?" he says. The distinction might be particularly blurry in tech-heavy animation content.



Eugene Pikulin
Named Partner

3B Law (Bruns Brennan Berry Pikulin & Jacobs)

Pikulin is a top production attorney, advising on everything from financing structure and the offers and deals for cast, directors and producers to distribution and delivery. Feature clients include Fifth Season ("80 for Brady," "Book Club 2," "The Lost Daughter," "Proxy"), A24 ("When You Finish Saving the World," "I Saw the TV Glow"), Bron Studios ("National Anthem," "Monkey Man"), Department of Motion Pictures ("O'Dessa") and Stay Gold Features ("Nanny"). On the television side, he's handled production legal for Jax Media ("The Conners," "South Side," "Russian Doll"),

Irony Point ("That Damn Michael Che") and Broadway Video ("Documentary Now").

Bad times won't stop the financing: "People want to see their names in the credits, so I feel like that money is always there," says Pikulin.



Elsa Ramo
Managing Partner

Michelle Chang
Partner

Erika Canchola
Partner

Ramo Law

Ramo founded the firm as a solo practitioner in 2005 and has expanded it to 25 attorneys, 14 of whom are women, including four of its six partners. Ramo handles business affairs for

prolific, high-profile content producers, including Imagine Entertainment (podcast slate deal with iHeart Media), Hello Sunshine (Amazon feature "Something From Tiffany's," directed by Daryl Wein and starring Zoey Deutsch), Kevin Hart's Laugh Out Loud and HartBeat Prods. (SiriusXM multiplatform deal; Apple TV+ doc "Number One on the Call Sheet") and Yale Entertainment. Chang works the unscripted space, advising such production companies as Boardwalk Pictures ("Chef's Table," "We Need to Talk About Cosby"), Campfire Studios ("WeWork," "Rudy! A Documusical") and Scout Prods. ("Queer Eye"). Canchola specializes in TV, serving as outside production counsel for Skydance Television ("Reacher," "Foundation"), 20th Television, Hulu's "Only Murders in the Building," as well as such features as "A Man Called Otto," starring Tom Hanks, "Sanctuary," starring Christopher Abbott and Margaret Qualley, and Netflix's upcoming "FUBAR," starring Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Slowdown for streamers and podcasts: "People are figuring out where the dust is going to settle, where the new or merged buyers are going to come from and what they're going to be interested in buying," says Ramo.



Benjamin S. Ross
Partner, Co-Chair, Media, Entertainment & Technology Practice Group

Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher

Ross reps the Azoff Company, royalties-collector Global Music Rights and Oak View Group sports/concert venues outfit that is aligned with music mogul Irving Azoff. The Los Angeles-based attorney also advises Blackstone-financed Candle Media in acquisitions including its \$150 million buy of digital media communicator ATTN: in July. Ross clients also include Universal Pictures, Shaquille O'Neal and SaveLive, which raised \$135 million to support small-capacity live venues.

Getting creative: With debt and capital markets in retreat, Ross says that Hollywood needs to conjure creative financing to keep content output humming along. "The producers and content creators are going to need to stretch their dollars" with back-end bonuses for talent if there's a lid on front-end pay and shrewd off-balance-sheet financings, he says.



Ramo Law handles Scout Prods., which produces Netflix hit "Queer Eye."



Nina Shaw worked on "The Woman King," starring Sheila Atim, Viola Davis and Thuso Mbedu.



Nina Shaw
Co-Founder, Partner



Abel Lezcano
Partner

**Del Shaw Moonves Tanaka Finkelstein
Lezcano Bobb & Dang**

Part of Shaw and Lezcano's ongoing mission is to make the entertainment industry more progressive and inclusive so it more accurately reflects the real world. One way they do that is through transactional law. While the firm's clients range from high-profile individuals including Ava DuVernay, Lawrence Fishburne and Nick Cannon to organizations like the NFL and Major League Soccer, they ensure their entire team seeks out

opportunities for clients, especially those from BIPOC, Latinx, LGBTQ+ and other underrepresented communities. Shaw counts working on "The Woman King"—and standing with its director Gina Prince-Bythewood as she advocated for the recognition of excellence regardless of where it originates—a career highlight. Lezcano and Shaw are true collaborators with complementary skill sets who trust each other's instincts and genuinely like each other, which they believe helps them get the best results for their clients.

A(bel) To Z(orro): About working on a Spanish-language version of "Zorro" for Amazon, Lezcano says: "It's provided me the opportunity to really understand the value and benefits of the international co-production model for the streaming age, which will be to the benefit of all our clients."



Christine Lepera
Partner, New York



congratulates
Christine Lepera,
and her fellow honorees,
for being named to
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Lawrence Shire

Partner,
Head, New Media, Motion Picture & Sports

Grubman Shire Meiselas & Sacks

Shire reps LeBron James and his SpringHill Company inking a Sony PlayStation deal and Beats headphones commercials. The New York-based attorney also handles Spike Lee, including for upcoming ESPN doc “Da Saga of Colin Kaepernick.” Shire also reps Robert De Niro starring in Netflix series “Zero Day.” Other clients include Latin music star J Balvin; Drake; CNN chief Chris Licht for his employment contract; Martha Stewart; football’s New England Patriots; Andrew Lloyd Webber; and podcasting for iHeart, Sony Music and Spotify.

Absorption: Shire advises aspiring entertainment attorneys to work in-office to absorb from senior lawyers and make personal contacts. “How else do you learn how to negotiate unless you listen to someone who has done it for years?” Shire says.


Amy Siegel

Partner,
Co-Chair, Entertainment, Sports & Media Group

Matthew Syrkyn

Partner,
Co-Chair, MediaTech Group

Bruce Tobey

Partner

Silvia Vannini

Partner

O'Melveny & Myers

O'Melveny & Myers' bicoastal entertainment transactional law team continues to impact the global media landscape, bolstered by new arrival Syrkyn, who joined the firm's New York office in September as co-chair of its MediaTech practice. In recent months, they've served as the outside counsel for the launch of streaming



If you were to ask me what concerns me about the future, I would definitely say the economic uncertainty and global tensions in general.”

Silvia Vannini

service SkyShowtime, a Comcast-Paramount Global joint venture, in 22 European countries (Syrkin); advised global streaming platform Starz on the sale of a 57% majority stake in Starzplay Arabia to an Abu Dhabi-based consortium led by E-Vision and ADQ (Tobey and Vannini); repped SVOD platform FuboTV in an exclusive multiyear first-look deal with Ryan Reynolds' company Maximum Effort Prods. for unscripted content (Siegel); Australian animation studio Animal Logic in its pending acquisition by Netflix (Vannini); Warner Bros./DC Entertainment in the release of Batman-based NFT collections via Palm NFT Studio (Siegel); and Disney/Marvel Studios in a 20-year name and likeness rights licensing deal with the

estate of Stan Lee (Siegel). In a major shift, as of March 27, Tobey left the firm to start a new role as exec VP and general counsel of Lionsgate.

Ukraine fallout? “I have not seen a direct impact yet in terms of the deal flow or the anticipated pipeline, but if you were to ask me what concerns me about the future, I would definitely say the economic uncertainty and global tensions in general,” says Vannini.


Marc H. Simon

Chair,
Entertainment & Sports Law Practice

Fox Rothschild

New York-based Simon repped Joe Pesci's first episodic streaming starring role with Peacock's “Bupkis” in October. Simon advises Oscar-winning filmmaker Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy attached as director for a new “Star Wars” film; she's also attached to Paramount's supernatural yarn “Brilliance.” Other clients include the Barack and Michelle Obama's Higher Ground Prods.; Oscar-winner Joseph Patel's overall deal in January with Disney platform Onyx Collective; and iDeal Partners, Jana Edelbaum, Rachel Cohen and Sharon Chang for their Sundance audience documentary winner “Beyond Utopia.”

Bonus time: Simon feels creative talent and rights-holders merit contingent compensation from video streamers, which substituted upfront “buyouts that were only for a select few and arbitrary amounts.” Streamers increasingly tier their content, which is ideal to structure bonus pay, Simon adds.



Music star J Balvin gets his legal advice from Grubman, Shire, Meiselas & Sacks.



Cheryl M. Snow
Partner



Bianca J. Levin
Partner



Daniel S. Passman
Partner

Gang, Tyre, Ramer, Brown & Passman

Snow, Levin and Passman lead the film and TV group at Gang, Tyre, closing headline-making deals for

top showbiz vets, including Dwayne Johnson (to star in and produce Amazon's "Red One"), Elton John (Disney+ agreements for the live stream and subsequent documentary about his final North American concert at Dodger Stadium), Ben Stiller (commercial deal with PlayStation; pact to direct Season 2 of Apple TV+ series "Severance"), Regina King (first-look deal with Netflix and pact to direct and executive produce "Man in Full" for the streamer), Martin Lawrence ("Bad Boys 4") and Robert Zemeckis (directing and producing deal for "Here," starring Tom Hanks and Robin Wright). They also inked career-changing deals for actors Kerry Condon (Oscar-nominated role in "The Banshees of Inisherin") and Bella Ramsey (HBO's "The Last of Us"), set Selma Blair to appear on "Dancing With the Stars" and to join ability-inclusive cosmetics company Guide

Beauty as its chief creative officer, and negotiated distribution agreements for docs including Brett Morgen's "Moonage Daydream" and Daniel Roher's Oscar-winning "Navalny."

Downside of a network series order: "Somebody who's working on 22 episodes, that's a very big commitment," says Snow. "They might prefer a 10- or eight-episode situation."



Gang, Tyre worked on Elton John's Disney+ agreement to live-stream his Dodger Stadium concert.

Congratulations to Marcie Cleary, Victoria Cook, Melissa Georges, Dionne Gordon, and Julie Murray for their recognition in *Variety's* Legal Impact Report, and to "Up Next" honoree Saphya Council.

Frankfurt Kurnit Klein + Selz ^{PC}



Chris Spicer
Partner

Marissa Román Griffith
Partner

Alissa Miller
Partner

Vanessa Roman
Partner

**Akin Gump Strauss
Hauer & Feld**

The Century City-based quartet worked \$3.5 billion in film, television, digital media, music and video game transactions in the past year. Spicer, Griffith, Miller and Roman often rep financial institutions. Clients include Media Rights Capital on multiple matters including licensing movie “Fair Play” in January for a reported \$20 million in a Sundance Film Festival auction. They repped Bank of America, including its ongoing senior secured revolving credit facility to Blumhouse for P&A and a \$100 million credit facility for Electric Entertainment in May. They advised Comerica Bank for its multi-million-dollar credit facility to Bryon Allen’s Entertainment Studios Motion Pictures affiliate, and a production loan in August for STX and Michael Mann’s film “Ferrari.” They repped JPMorgan Chase Securities for its \$82 million production loan in June for the second season of “Power Book IV: Force.” Other clients include East West Bank, HPS Investment Partners and MUFG Bank.

Casting a wider net: Hollywood used to source content narrowly from books, magazine articles and Broadway, but in the digital age “anyone and anything can be turned into content that then can be monetized,” says Griffith. Sources now extend to TikTok vignettes, video games and output from digital influencers, she observes.



Robert Strent
Partner

Grubman Shire Meiselas & Sacks

Strent advises Lizzo, including for her Amazon Prime reality series “Watch Out for the Big Grrrls,” which won an Emmy in September. He repped the NBA for an HBO documentary about the Boston Celtics. Strent negotiates for Priyanka Chopra Jonas in acting/producing deals, including recently expanding her deal with Amazon Studios. Other clients include former Time Warner CEO and present-day producer Jeff Bewkes, Mariska Hargitay, LeBron James, Meadowlark Media, actor/influencer Shay Mitchell and Vox Media’s New York Magazine in licensing intellectual property. Strent is in New York.

More arm wrestling: As Hollywood buyers become multiplatform, they increasingly angle for stage-play adaptation, documentary and podcast rights that they used to leave to creators, Strent says. “You’re negotiating deal points that maybe you didn’t negotiate years ago.”



Matthew C. Thompson
Partner, Co-Leader,
Entertainment, Sports & Media Group

Sidley Austin

Thompson repped Mark Burnett continuing his relationship at MGM and Amazon in a multiyear producer pact in November; Ben Affleck and Matt Damon launching producer Artists Equity with a minimum \$100 million investment from RedBird

Capital Partners in November; and Artists Equity’s theatrical “Air” at Amazon Studios. In 2022, Thompson worked music-related acquisitions amounting to nine figures for Warner Music, including indie label 300 Entertainment. The attorney also repped Raine Group in its July sale of Thrill One Sports & Entertainment.

Lookin’ good: Despite economic headwinds including tightening financial markets, Hollywood rides higher than many other industries because consumer consumption rises. “Entertainment assets continue to be attractive, and we anticipate being as busy ever,” working deals, Thompson says.



You’re negotiating deal points that maybe you didn’t negotiate years ago.”

Robert Strent



Matthew Thompson repped Matt Damon and Ben Affleck’s Artists Equity “Air.”


Seth Traxler

Partner

Kirkland & Ellis

As co-leader of the firm's technology & IP transactions practice, Traxler pursues agreements that advance all parties' interests and help the industry evolve, including media rights deals, music catalog sales, brand ambassador relationships and acquisitions of content companies. He represented Hipgnosis in acquiring Justin Timberlake's catalog in 2022 and Justin Bieber's catalog in 2023. Launched in 2021, Hipgnosis has already spent roughly \$500 million on music catalogs. Traxler advised MNRK Music Group on its sale of Death Row Records to Snoop Dogg, and counseled ABRY in its \$100 million investment in Kevin Hart's company, Hartbeat.

Economic shifts: Traxler says volatility, including pricing dislocation caused by economic uncertainty, makes his job tricky: "It made predicting the future even harder than normal. Then, once any deal did gain traction, the challenge was to move as fast, wisely and as fairly as possible."


Bryan Wolf

Partner

Cliff Gilbert-Lurie

Partner

Dean Bahat

Partner

Benjamin Rubinfeld

Partner

Ziffren Brittenham

Each member of this team has his own



Sophia Yen advised Kevin Hart on the formation of his company Hartbeat.

superpowers. Wolf, fluent in corporate and financial languages, brings a fresh perspective to transactions; Gilbert-Lurie's meticulous, Jedi-like attention to detail means he knows the importance that even the smallest details play in structuring a deal; Rubinfeld can explain the intricacies of complex deals in terms anyone can understand; and Bahat's past agency experience gives him insights into the needs and wants of all parties involved in a negotiation. Be it Wolf's first-look deal for Skydance's live-action features that nabbed a multi-hundred-million-dollar commitment from Apple, Gilbert-Lurie

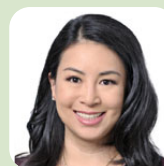
overseeing Fremantle's acquisition of Eureka Entertainment or Rubinfeld and Bahat's recent Boulderlight Pictures first-look deal with New Line — not to mention selling Jimmy Warden's spec script for "Cocaine Bear" — Ziffren's transactional team helps its clients move forward.

Accountability: "One of the trends of profits in the lack of data sharing, and the sort of black-box approach to data and profit information," Rubinfeld says. "That makes it more challenging to structure some of these deals so they benefit everybody, but it's a challenge we look forward to."



One of the trends ushered in by streaming is the opacity of profits in the lack of data sharing."

Benjamin Rubinfeld


Sophia Yen

Partner

Manatt, Phelps & Phillips

Yen led the Manatt team that advised Kevin Hart's Hartbeat on the multiplatform media company's formation and its \$100 million capital raise by private equity firm ABRY Partners. Yen advised independent AVOD service FilmRise on upsizing its working capital facility to a nine-figure commitment, and various companies on cross-border deals. These include MS Participation's financing of "Lee," starring Kate Winslet; and MS and Storyteller Prods.' financing of Michael Mann's "Ferrari."

Reluctance from non-bank lenders: "They've been a lot more shy about lending in the media entertainment space, and, if they do, it comes at a very high price," says Yen. "And that's important because not all companies can get a bank loan."

YORN LEVINE BARNES KRINTZMAN
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**JEFF ENDLICH
GREGG GELLMAN
RYAN GOODELL
DAVID KRINTZMAN
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LAW FIRM

Music



Lisa Alter and Katie Baron worked on a deal that included the music catalog of Future, above.



Lisa Alter
Partner

Katie Baron
Partner

Alter Kendrick & Baron

Alter and Baron closed deals worth over \$3 billion during the past 12 months. They represented Primary Wave in the acquisition of music publishing and master recording catalogs of iconic artists such as the Doors,

the Ramones, Def Leppard, Alice in Chains, Huey Lewis and the News, and the Strokes. They also helped Influence Media Partners team with BlackRock Alternative Investors and Warner Music Group on a new fund and transactions that included acquiring stakes in the catalogs of Blake Shelton, Future and Tainy.

Advice for would-be music lawyers: “Saying ‘I don’t want to know about any other disciplines’ is shortsighted and will not make you the most valuable attorney,” says Alter. “In the short term, this business may become even more heavily M&A as new players enter the scene with five- or 10-year plans.”



Jeff Biederman
Shareholder



Steve Plinio
Shareholder

Paul Schindler
Shareholder, Senior Chair, N.Y. Entertainment
& Media Practice

Greenberg Traurig

Biederman represented Apollo Global Management in its \$1.8 billion music asset-backed securitization of the Concord Music catalog, the largest music industry transaction of 2022. He also represented Litmus in its purchase of Keith Urban’s recordings catalog, which includes 10 multi-platinum, platinum- or gold-certified studio albums and a greatest hits compilation. Schindler negotiated Open on Sunday’s acquisition of the publishing catalogs of Keith Sweat, BB King, Liz Rose, Jacob Banks, Eric Bellinger and Metro Boomin. Plinio was responsible for a variety of agreements concerning Katy Perry’s Las Vegas residency, and a substantial celebrity endorsement and sponsorship agreement for Perry as the godmother to Norwegian Cruise Line’s innovative ship, Norwegian Prima.

Artist divide: “It seems like the middle class in music disappeared,” Biederman observes. “Back in the day, you could have a couple of hits and live off the radio play and touring. In the streaming era, it seems the top artists continue to do well, and those in the middle struggle more.”



Jason Boyarski
Managing Partner

Boyarski Fritz

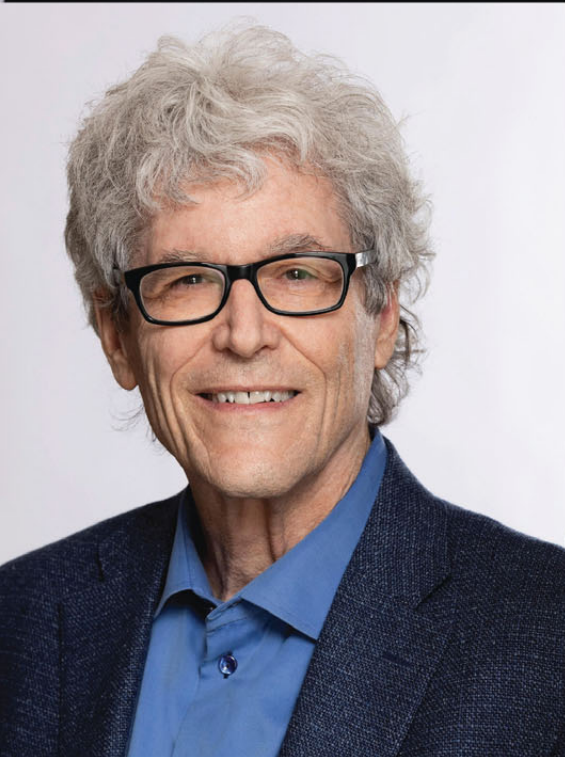
Over the last year, Boyarski negotiated over \$175 million in transactions involving catalog sales, endorsements, branding, live events, visual rights, publishing and recording for a wide range of artists and estates, from Meek Mill and JVKE to Prince, Donny Hathaway, and hit-makers Tainy, Louis Bell and Stargate. Boyarski’s expertise allows him to navigate the ever-changing landscape of music — counseling creatives on non-traditional deal structures, and advocating for more “forgiving deal terms to allow for better decision-making power to maximize revenues.”

Ongoing challenge: “The royalty structure is convoluted and outdated,” Boyarski says. “The market share payment system — versus a system of paying artists an actual portion of subscriber fees based on music use — has been an interesting issue and will continue to be debated.”



The royalty structure is convoluted and outdated. The market share system ... has been an interesting issue and will continue to be debated.”

Jason Boyarski



Congratulations to our partners

**BIANCA LEVIN, CHERYL SNOW, DANIEL PASSMAN,
DONALD S. PASSMAN, ETHAN SCHIFFRES, J. EUGENE SALOMON JR.**

And to all our friends and colleagues being recognized in
Variety's Legal Impact Report

GANG · TYRE · RAMER
BROWN & PASSMAN


Jordan Bromley

Leader, Manatt Entertainment

Eric Custer

Partner, Manatt Entertainment

Gary Gilbert

Partner, Manatt Entertainment

Beau Stapleton

Partner, Manatt Entertainment

Manatt, Phelps & Phillips

Two of the firm's biggest 2022 deals are tied to Kobalt. Manatt represented Dundee Partners' \$1.1 billion acquisition of Kobalt Capital Ltd.'s music rights portfolio, KMR Music Royalties II. Dundee and global investor KKR formed joint-venture Chord Music Partners, which stewards the portfolio's 62,000 recordings. Bromley's team also represented Francisco Partners Management when the investment firm took a majority stake in Kobalt Music. Other key moments include guiding catalog sales to BMG for the estate of blues icon John Lee Hooker and for British rocker Peter Dinklage and metaverse developer Melon's launch of a National Football League-licensed Roblox experience, NFL Tycoon.

Brave new world: "Artificial intelligence is creating excitement and unlocking more ways for artists to innovate, but it also brings threats to

the creator economy," says Bromley. "It begs the question of how we can create an ecosystem that harnesses the benefits of A.I. and related technology without jeopardizing the careers of music artists and other creators. The industry must collectively advocate to ensure artists that their original music and content are protected."


Doug Davis

Founder, Principal

The Davis Firm

Davis is known for his creative deal-making. On behalf of a multiplatinum rapper who cannot be disclosed, he helped pioneer a secured debt transaction instead of a catalog sale. Similarly, the man who handled contracts for such key executives as Kobalt COO Jeanette Perez and Warner Chappell president Ryan Press, enabled a superstar producer to monetize catalogs without selling them.

Fresh opportunity: "The influx of private equity into the creators' side of the financial equation is finally allowing us to protect them in the most meaningful way since I began practicing 24 years ago," Davis says. "With billions of dollars flowing in for catalog sales and debt securitization through novel and creative ways, the next decade will likely be the most financially fruitful in the history of the music business for producers, songwriters and artists."



Eric Greenspan and Aaron Rosenberg work with Dead & Company and Grateful Dead Prods.


Ilene S. Farkas

Partner, Member, Executive Committee & Co-Chair, Music Litigation Practice

James G. Sammataro

Partner, Co-chair, Media + Entertainment Group

Frank P. Scibilia

Partner, Co-Chair, Copyright & Music Practice Groups

Benjamin K. Semel

Partner, Co-Chair, Music Litigation practice

Pryor Cashman

Two significant rulings last summer from the Copyright Royalty Board — to uphold the royalty rate increase from

10.5% to 15.1% for streaming services in the 2018-2022 term, and settlement on a 15.35% rate for the 2023-2027 term — were the latest wins scored by Semel and Scibilia on behalf of music publishers and songwriters. In March, plaintiffs dropped a claim against Benny Blanco, Halsey, Khalid, Ed Sheeran and others over the 2018 hit "Eastside," bolstering Farkas' track record in copyright infringement cases while Sammataro represents the estate of Chris Cornell in a dispute with Soundgarden and Chris Brown in a claim against Brown's song "Pills & Automobiles."

Bustling: "2022 was a busy year for Pryor Cashman's music and entertainment practices," says Farkas. Wins ranged "from successfully representing a significant number of artists, labels and publishers in music copyright disputes, to securing a historic win for songwriters and music publishers in the Copyright Royalty Board proceedings, to defending creators and streaming services against attacks on their First Amendment rights to creative freedom."



Manatt, Phelps & Phillips helped with the acquisition of Kobalt, which counts Phoebe Bridgers on its roster.



With billions of dollars flowing in for catalog sales and debt securitization through novel and creative ways, the next decade will be the most financially fruitful .. for producers, songwriters and artists."

Doug Davis



Eric Greenspan
Partner

Aaron Rosenberg
Partner

**Myman Greenspan Fineman Fox
Rosenberg & Light**

Greenspan was a Duke undergrad in 1971 when he promoted his first Grateful Dead show, a relationship that continues to flourish as he represents Dead & Company. Given that role, Greenspan's longtime partner Jeff Light ran point on extending the licensing agreement between Grateful Dead Prods. and Rhino Records. The firm has been involved in some notable nine-figure catalog sales, most recently Rosenberg's work with Justin



A-level catalogs are the exception, because there are only so many."

Eric Greenspan

Bieber. Rosenberg also represented LVRN (Love Renaissance) when they sold a stake in their company to Matt Pincus' Music, his joint venture with investment banking player LionTree.

Limited real estate: Although most catalogs will not generate the multiples they once did due to rising interest rates, Greenspan notes that "A-level catalogs are the exception because there are only so many, just like there are only so many places in Manhattan on the 20th floor with a view of Central Park."



David Lande
Partner

David Byrnes
Partner

Ziffren Brittenham

Beyoncé's activities this past year, from Tiffany ambassadorship to the release



of "Renaissance" and her performance at Atlantis Dubai's grand opening, were handled by Lande, who also negotiated the estimated \$100 million sale of Justin Timberlake's catalog to Hipgnosis, Olivia Rodrigo's sold-out global tour, BTS/HYBE's Live Nation stadium concerts, plus Coldplay's collaboration on the chart-topping "My Universe" and Rosalía's "Motomami" tour. Byrne handled Beyoncé's Parkwood Entertainment deal extensions for Halle and Chloe Bailey. He also negotiated continuation deals for Kelly Clarkson for her show and home furniture line, and Blake Shelton for "The Voice" and new series "Barmageddon."

Time for a change: Byrnes says he'd like to see "more emphasis on artist development rather than social media followings, and clarity on the eligibility of sound recordings for copyright terminations, including pre-'72 sound recordings in the termination scheme."

Congratulations *VARIETY* 2023 Legal Impact Honorees

**Dina
LaPolt**



**Sarah
Scott**



**Dina LaPolt**

Founder/Owner

Sarah Scott

Managing Partner

[LaPolt Law](#)

A Valentine campaign on behalf of Cardi B and Offset at McDonald's, touted on a Super Bowl ad, and a deal to release new songs from The Kid LAROI through Epic Games' ultra-popular Fortnite were among LaPolt Law's recent feats. Clients include 21 Savage, deadmau5 and Steven Tyler, but the firm's founder remains focused on music creators' rights, too. She is advising U.S. House of Representatives members on the Restoring Artistic Protection (RAP) Act, which



would prevent citing an artist's rap lyrics as evidence in court cases. As well, she helped initiate a state version of that legislation in California and is working on getting one passed in New York, too.

Freedom of speech: "We need to continue to pass legislation protecting against the use of creative expressions as evidence against people in court," says LaPolt. "Moreover, this is only happening to Black rap music artists! This practice has a chilling effect on creators' First Amendment right to freely express themselves."



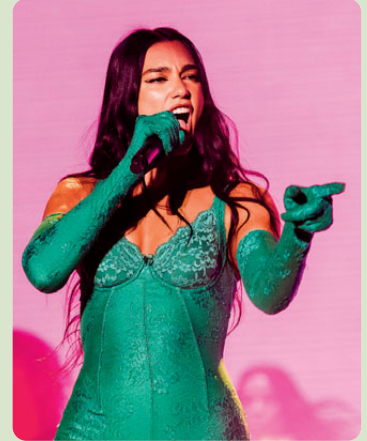
We need to continue to pass legislation protecting against the use of creative expressions as evidence."

— **Dina LaPolt****Christine Lepera**

Partner

[Mitchell Silberberg & Knupp](#)

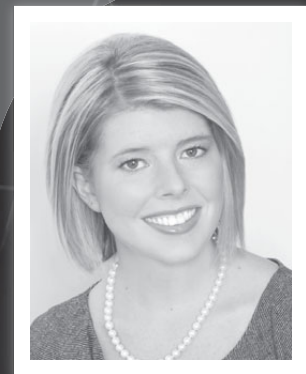
Lepera is an in-demand attorney for copyright litigation with an impressive track record on infringement cases, starting with her efforts in defense of Andrew Lloyd Webber and his "Phantom of the Opera." Lepera's recent successes include her work on Katy Perry's "Dark Horse," where the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the ruling of the district court that plaintiffs failed to prove substantial similarity as a matter of law. She is currently defending Dua Lipa and the other songwriters of "Levitating" from competing infringement claims.



Christine Lepera is currently defending pop star Dua Lipa in a lawsuit.

Practice, practice, practice: "I studied classical piano and then jazz piano for a number of years," Lepera says. "I think it helps me tremendously in terms of understanding the nuts and bolts when I interact with an expert."

We are delighted to congratulate
Lisa Alter & Katie Baron
on being named to *Variety's* 2023
"Legal Impact Report."

[akbllp.com](#)

CONGRATULATIONS

Variety's 2023 Legal Impact Honorees

**Larry Shire
Robert Strent
Peter Grant**

Music Honorees

**Kenny Meiselas
David Jacobs**

"Up Next" Honoree

Vishaal Sharma

We are so proud of your contributions to the industry and our firm.

**ALLEN GRUBMAN AND EVERYONE AT
GRUBMAN SHIRE MEISELAS & SACKS, P. C.**

**GRUBMAN
SHIRE
MEISELAS &
SACKS**

ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA LAWYERS

**Kenny Meiselas**

Named Partner, Head, Music Dept.

**David Jacobs**

Partner

Grubman, Shire, Meiselas & Sacks

Meiselas recently watched his A-list clients Lady Gaga and the Weeknd headline stadiums and he will soon see them topline other creative ventures. Meiselas negotiated the deals for The Weeknd's forthcoming HBO show "The Idol" as well as Gaga's role as Harley Quinn in the "Joker" sequel. Jacobs represented Lil Nas X on his debut concert tour and in his sponsorship deals with M&Ms, Coach and Taco Bell. He also has provided counsel to Zach Bryan, Kali Uchis and RealestK.

Additional headlines: "After touring the U.S. successfully post-pandemic, now we're seeing superstars return to the international stages," Meiselas says. "There's also a really nice trend with musical artists who are much more than that — they're also film actors, producers, writers and creators."

**Vince Phillips**

Managing Partner

Aurielle Brooks

Attorney

Arrington & Phillips

In the wake of a 2021 joint-venture label with Motown for prolific hip-hop star YoungBoy Never Broke



There's also a really nice trend with musical artists who are much more than that — they're also film actors, producers, writers and creators."

Kenny Meiselas

Again, last year saw Phillips land a deal that moved the artist from Atlantic to the Universal Music label. Terms were not disclosed but both were multimillion-dollar pacts. He and Brooks represented Real Boston Richey's signing to Future's Epic-associated label Freebandz and helped Bobby Shmurda's Roc Nation/Epic contract. Independent of the firm, they guided a joint venture for famed photographer Cam Kirk with

Atlantic Records to set up Collective Gallery, a label-styled company that represents photographers.

New day: Phillips says unique terms in YoungBoy's Motown deals are "a testimony to the fact that we are in a transformative time. It's an era when attorneys and business affair offices can be more imaginative than ever; a time when artists are appreciated while creating a true win-win opportunity for the label, distributor and the artist."

EISNER LLP PROUDLY CONGRATULATES OUR OWN

Jordan Gutglass**Daniel Shulman****Andrew Tavel**

FOR BEING NAMED TO **VARIETY'S 2023**
LEGAL IMPACT AND UP NEXT REPORTS



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Michael Poster

Partner-in-Charge (New York),
Music Acquisitions
& Financing Chair

Michelman & Robinson

Not long after the busy Poster closed Opus Music Group's acquisition of Colombian singer/actor Maluma's publishing catalog at the tail end of 2021, February 2022 saw him ink the sale of singer, composer and producer Mike Posner's publishing assets to Iconoclats. Terms for both transactions were not disclosed but each ran into eight figures. Pythagoras Music Fund's purchase of producer rights and the publishing catalog for Danish production/songwriting team Soul-

shock & Karlin, and steering the sale of Massarsky Consulting to showbiz accounting and business management firm Citrin Cooperman were also among his feats.

High Tide: "My team and I are very fortunate to find ourselves at the crossroads of the music industry and the investment community, especially in a time when the level of investments into music assets shows no signs of slowing down," Poster says.



My team and I are very fortunate to find ourselves at the crossroads of the music community and the investment community."

— **Michael Poster**


Bobby Rosenbloum

Chairman, Global Entertainment & Media Practice

Jess Rosen

Shareholder, Co-Chair, Atlanta Entertainment
& Media Practice

Greenberg Traurig



Rosenbloum's deals have generated over \$5 billion for the industry in the last year. Clients he represents for music transactions include Spotify, Meta Platforms, Amazon Studios and Apple Studios. He also navigates the development of new revenue streams for the Recording Academy. Rosen's negotiations included the sale of Brad Paisley's catalog to HarbourView Equity and Kenny Chesney's catalog to Hipgnosis, a 2022 stadium tour, the renewal of the No Shoes Radio station on Sirius XM and the upping of Cindy Mabe to chairwoman at UMG Nashville.

Metaversing: A leader in the metaverse space, Rosenbloum says the concept "presents incredible opportunities for integration of music content. The rights issues are daunting. The industry must come together to address these issues, or there is a real risk that these opportunities will never materialize."

CONGRATULATIONS JASON BOYARSKI

VARIETY
POWER OF LAW
LEGAL IMPACT
HONOREE

[BF] Boyarski Fritz LLP
Attorneys At Law



**Paul Rothenberg**

Founding Partner

Jeremy Mohr

Founding Partner

Josh Binder

Founding Partner

Rothenberg, Mohr & Binder

Rothenberg advised on the \$400 million sale of 300 Entertainment to Warner Music. He also negoti-

ated catalog deals for Skylar Grey, Emily Warren, Digital Farm Animals and Jon Bellion, whom he moved to ASCAP in a massive deal while striking another deal to keep Charlie Puth at BMI. Binder brokered the launch of former Capitol Records chairman/CEO Jeff Vaughn's Signal Records at

Columbia Records and advised TDE Entertainment CEO Anthony "Top Dawg" Tiffith on a partnership with Capitol for Doechii. Mohr was kept busy with Gunna, whose No. 1 album release coincided with his being jailed on RICO charges. Since Gunna's release, Mohr has been breathing

new life into previous agreements.

Time for a change: "Put the 360 deal out of its misery," says Rothenberg. "It's already in its final death throes but should be eliminated unilaterally — even in older deals. The original justification has long since disappeared."



Put the 360 deal out of its misery."

Paul Rothenberg



Gang, Tyre reps Adele, whose residency in Las Vegas is a huge success.



CONGRATULATIONS

MICHAEL POSTER

Partner-in Charge of M&R's New York office, the firm's Music Acquisitions & Financing Chair, and a Variety Legal Impact Report honoree for 2023. We couldn't be prouder of the extraordinary work you continue to do for clients buying and selling publishing catalogs and navigating music financing transactions.

M&R and Mike know that making a legal impact requires a strong team, and they salute the stellar associates who help power our clients' music acquisition and financing deals.



ELLIOT WEISS

MEHDI SINAKI

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J. Eugene Salomon Jr.

Managing Partner, Co-Head, Music Group

Ethan Schiffres

Partner, Co-Head, Music Group

Donald S. Passman

Partner, Co-Head, Music

Gang, Tyre, Ramer, Brown & Passman

The music team at Gang, Tyre, Ramer, Brown & Passman represents some of the biz's top talent, including Elton John, Paul Simon, Taylor Swift and Adele. Among their noteworthy deals this past year are the sale of Neil Diamond's catalog to UMG; Pink's "Trustfall" album and stadium tour; Adele's Las Vegas residency; Oscar, Emmy and Grammy-winning composer Ludwig Goransson for "Turning Red" and "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever"; the Disney+ livestream agreement of John's farewell concert at Dodger Stadium; and Camila Cabello's turn as judge on "The Voice," plus her performance at the UEFA Championships. The team says it would like to see "the industry coalesce around dealing with A.I.-generated music," and state the sheer volume of touring as challenging due to "lack of venues, personnel and transportation."

On trend: "There is a massive shift in power toward the artists as the labels have decided not to chase artists until they already have a buzz, which creates a lot of bidding wars," these attorneys observe. Their original music and content are protected."


Daniel Shulman

Partner

Andrew Tavel

Partner

Eisner

Shulman helped to facilitate the world premiere of client Jon Batiste's "American Symphony" in September, including the rights to film in Carnegie Hall. He also represented Son Lux, who composed the Oscar-nominated score for the multi award-winning "Everything Everywhere All at Once." Tavel offered counsel to multiple artists on the process of terminating copyrights in compositions and recordings, then helped identify new opportunities. His clients include a number of top-notch producers such as Jonah Shy (Camila Cabello, Shawn Mendes) and Jasper Harris (Jack Harlow, Post Malone).

Forward thinking: Shulman projects, "There's going to come a time in the next 10 years where a lot of artists are going to get the rights back to their works. Then the balance will shift to artists' controlling their destiny a bit more than in the past."



Daniel Shulman's client Jon Batiste performed his "American Symphony" at Carnegie Hall.


Donald Woodard

Founding Partner

Uwonda Carter Scott

Founding Partner

Keisha Perry Walker

Of Counsel

Carter + Woodard

The Atlanta-based firm, which came together through the merging of practices in January 2021, is moving into new offices due to the expanding volume and scope of its work. Carter's

longtime client Metro Boomin recently sold a portion of his publishing catalog to Shamrock Capital for nearly \$70 million. Woodard represented Summer Walker as she released her chart-topping sophomore album, "Still Over It," and continues to build momentum with the next phase of her performance career. They've also been involved with Lil Yachty and his new rock album "Let's Start Here," which he showcased on "Saturday Night Live." Walker contributes television and film experience, including work for Kevin Hart's company, Hartbeat.

Counsel for emerging artists: "There are a lot of things that artists can do without the major label machine," Woodard notes. "Also, they should be patient and make sure that they do not sign anything without proper legal representation. Someone may present them with a document that they'll be excited about, then we'll have to come in later and try to fix it."



There's going to come a time in the next 10 years where a lot of artists are going to get the rights back to their works."

Daniel Shulman

Up Next



Alex Akhavan
Associate, Entertainment,
Technology & Advertising
Sheppard, Mullin

Akhavan is the lead attorney and point of contact for Disney TV Animation and pro bono client L.A. Opera. He's also handled unscripted and scripted TV and movie projects for Amazon Studios and helped TelevisaUnivision launch its streaming platform, ViX. Akhavan served as lead outside counsel for Amazon scripted series "Swarm," leading negotiations with creators Donald Glover and Janine Nabers, along with Dominique Fishback, Malia Obama, Damson Idris and Chloe Bailey. He's the go-to for Amazon's unscripted slate and closed deals with Skydance Sports for "Good Rivals," Rihanna's Fenty brand for "Savage X," Bunim-Murray for "Lizzo's Watch Out for the Big Grrrls" and Springhill (Lebron James and Maverick Carter) for "Top Class." The attorney leveraged his knowledge of VFX to manage all VFX agreements for Amazon's "Rings of Power," including with Weta, ILM and the Third Floor.



Omeed Anvar
Associate
Latham & Watkins

Anvar has been involved with some of the most high-profile recent deals in showbiz. These include: Endeavor's \$775 million sale of a majority interest in Endeavor Content to CJ ENM; A24 Films' \$225 million equity private placement and its senior secured revolving credit facility; Skydance Media's partnership with the NFL and NFL Films to create Skydance Sports; Blumhouse's arrangement with Universal and Morgan Creek to reboot "The Exorcist" franchise; Beyoncé in brand ambassador engagements; Tom Brady in intellectual property licenses and corporate ventures; Jon Favreau across entertainment projects, real estate, employment, trademark management and other areas; Stampede Entertainment in joint ventures, including HappyNest with UTA and Specific House with author Mo Willems; and Mast-Jägermeister in connection with its investment in Teremana, the tequila brand founded by Dwayne Johnson.



Saphya Council helped provide the legal architecture for some of today's most innovative game projects."



Saphya Council
Associate, Interactive Entertainment Group
Frankfurt Kurnit Klein & Selz

Channeling a lifelong love of horror stories and video games, New York-based Council helped provide the legal architecture for some of today's most innovative game projects in the horror category. Recent work includes working with teams that advised on and drafted development, distribution and independent contractor agreements for Gun Media on its upcoming "Texas Chainsaw Massacre" game; repping game developer Turtle Rock Studios ("Left 4 Dead," "Back 4 Blood"); and advising on IP licenses and negotiating development and distribution agreements for "The Walking Dead" experience, developed by Genvid. Council brings to her work a deep knowledge of interactive technology via her background at NYU Shanghai, from which she graduated with a bachelor's in interactive media arts.



Will Craver
Associate
Barnes & Thornburg

Working alongside Entertainment, Sports & Media Practice Group Chair Jason Karlov, Craver leads a team that

analyzes music copyright claims. He also advises pro sports teams on music licensing and music issues related to live events. Craver created an analytical model teams use to estimate the costs of music licenses and determine settlement offers. The model is used to negotiate settlement agreements on behalf of dozens of major sports teams throughout U.S. professional leagues facing claims of alleged music copyright infringements played via clients' social media accounts. Teams for which Craver handled music licensing include the Philadelphia Eagles, New Orleans Saints, Indianapolis Colts, Atlanta Hawks and Los Angeles Dodgers. Craver also handled legal work for Michael Bolton, and music-related legal work for John Fogerty and T Bone Burnett.



Kevin Eskowitz
Partner
Rothenberg, Mohr & Binder

The son of touring industry heavyweight Bruce Eskowitz, Kevin Eskowitz, the newest partner at RMB, grew up spending several nights a week at live gigs, including with Smashing Pumpkins and Alanis Morissette. That background informs his representation of such clients as Gryffin, JPEGMafia, Noname, label and management company GODMODE, and many other songwriters, producers, labels, publishing, and management companies. Notably, he recently helped lead Conan Gray from online influencer to fleshed-out creative artist, with a national tour that saw him move into major amphitheaters and climb to No. 3 on Billboard's top album chart with "Superache." The attorney has quickly built a reputation for helping creators at the forefront of today's digital and social media-fueled environment.



Alex Akhavan closed the Bunim-Murray deal for Amazon's "Lizzo's Watch Out for the Big Grrrls."



Lauren Fried
Partner

Loeb & Loeb

Along with Loeb & Loeb's John Gatti, Fried recently secured a victory for DirectTV in litigation brought by SAG-AFTRA involving the issue of whether the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) applies to a TV distributor, which is not a producer under the DMCA, and whether DirecTV owes SAG-AFTRA actor residuals related to David E. Kelley's "Mr. Mercedes." Other wins: for Miramax against photographer Firooz Zahedi, who claimed to own the rights to an iconic photograph of Uma Thurman used in a movie poster for "Pulp Fiction"; and for singer/songwriter Tracy Chapman in a copyright infringement case based on rapper and songwriter Nicky Minaj's sampling of Chapman's works without permission. Fried is currently defending CNN in a copyright infringement case, repping Netflix and Mark and Ross Duffer against allegations that "Stranger Things" copied elements from an unpublished screenplay, and BET against an implied-in-fact contract claim based on an alleged misappropriation of a pitch.



Janniece Gilliams
Attorney

Ziffren Brittenham

Gilliams, who reps top showbiz talent and production companies, has played a major role in bringing high-profile deals to a close. Among them: her negotiation of comic giant Eddie Murphy's acting deals for the upcoming "Beverly Hills Cop 4" and "Candy Cane Lane" features. Alongside her teams at Ziffren, Gilliams also represents top-tier corporate and individual clients such as Macro Media, Words + Pictures, Universal Music Group, Microsoft,

Harpo Films, Dick Wolf, Matt Damon, Janelle Monáe, Shakira and Craig Robinson, among other highly recognized rights holders and talent.



Jordan Gutglass
Senior Counsel

Eisner

Gutglass specializes in the music industry, with clients ranging from high-profile artists to songwriters, producers and developing acts. Recent work includes negotiating G-Eazy's Resorts World 2022 Las Vegas residency deal; repping Jon Batiste in his global endorsement deals with Amazon for Amazon Prime Day and Tommy Hilfiger for its fall 2022 campaign; and handling Guapdad 4000's endorsement deals with Monster Energy, Hpnqtq and Skullcandy. Additionally, over the past year he closed over \$60 million in catalog sales. Also, he provided clearance work for recording artist Sofi Tukker's "Wet Tennis" album; repped producer Jasper Harris in his composer agreements for seasons 1 and 2 of TV show "Dave"; and repped Grammy-nominated producer of the year Boi-1da, including in connection with his production work on Drake's "Her Loss" album and Beyoncé's "Renaissance" album.



Jordan Gutglass reps many music biz figures including producer Boi-1da.



Vishaal Sharma's recent feats include repping LeBron James in various matters, including an endorsement deal with Sony PlayStation."



Josh McWhorter
Associate

Sam Djahanbani
Associate

Venable

McWhorter advises corporate companies and talent on a wide range of business deals focusing on commercial agreements and intellectual property aspects. Recent matters include a brand ambassador deal for a household name star, and a videogame licensing deal in which a client will appear as a playable character. Djahanbani advises companies and individuals on corporate partnerships and taxation matters and has structured tax planning for execs, musicians and entrepreneurs. Recent work includes advising an A-list actor and his company in a partnership with an online platform; helping a well-known actor-producer acquire an equity stake in a beverage company; and helping guide a comedian's podcast company.



Vishaal Sharma
Associate

Grubman Shire Meiselas & Sacks

Sharma's recent feats include repping LeBron James in various matters, including an endorsement deal with Sony PlayStation and his appearance in Netflix's "The Redeem Team" and

Amazon's "Thursday Night Football in the Shop"; Robert De Niro in a producing deal for "Midnight Run II" and an acting deal for Barry Levinson's "The Wise Guys"; Lady Gaga in an acting deal for Todd Phillips' "Joker 2: Folie à Deux"; Spike Lee as production counsel for ESPN series "Da Saga of Colin Kaepernick"; and Andrew Ross Sorkin in connection with exec producer services for development of a scripted HBO project on the GameStop stock story. Other clients: NBA, Paramount and MTV, former HBO CEO Richard Plepler's Eden Entertainment, iHeartMedia, Sony Music Entertainment and the Sprinhill Company.



Monica Zhang
Associate

Greenberg Traurig

Zhang's client roster extends to recording artists, songwriters, producers, and negotiators of deals concerning publishing, composing, production, touring, endorsements, influencers, licensing and distribution. She also serves as outside counsel for indie labels and music publishers, and advises on both catalog acquisitions and sales of music copyrights, trademarks and related rights. Recent significant work includes advising Apollo's Capital Solutions, a division of Apollo Global Management, on what the trade press has described as the largest asset-backed securitization offering of music rights in the industry to date, with \$1.8 billion of bonds secured by Concord's diverse catalog of more than one million pieces of recorded music and publishing assets, including those of Phil Collins, Creedence Clearwater Revival, R.E.M., Daft Punk, Miles Davis, Imagine Dragons, Pink Floyd, Cyndi Lauper, Little Richard and James Taylor.

List profiles by Dean Budnick, Peter Caranicas, Paula Hendrickson, Todd Longwell, Robert Marich, Geoff Mayfield, Lily Moayeri



**SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT
WARMLY CONGRATULATES**

MARTIN LAWRENCE

ON RECEIVING HIS STAR ON THE HOLLYWOOD WALK OF FAME



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Bad Boy Makes Good

As Martin Lawrence preps to receive a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, he looks back at a laugh-filled path • By Scott Huver



Before deciding on comedy as his true calling, Martin Lawrence seriously considered a career as a professional boxer, even becoming a Golden Gloves contender. He credits that pugilistic discipline for equipping him with the resilience and tenacity necessary to survive in the entertainment industry.

"Boxing gave me the training, the consistency and, most importantly, the focus," Lawrence tells *Variety*. "To study your craft, to want to be good at your craft and to be excellent at it — you can reach those heights and just be the best that you could be."

Lawrence went the distance and then some in his 30-plus-year career in stand-up comedy, television and film. He'll celebrate those accomplishments April 20 with one of the industry's most iconic honors: a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. The tribute wasn't a prize he'd always had his eye on, but he admits it's one he'd contemplated in recent years, especially after getting that other equally permanent mark of achievement, cementing his hand- and footprints in the courtyard of the TCL Chinese Theater.

"I didn't think about the star being something that I would get one day," Lawrence says. "I thought the hands and feet was it, and then I started thinking, it'd be nice to get a star one day, have my imprint in Hollywood like that." After cultivating such an expansive body of work — from his "Def Comedy Jam" days to his eponymous '90s sitcom to movie roles in franchises like "Bad Boys" and "Big Momma's House" — he says receiving the star "feels like I'm



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Thomas Mikal Ford, left, Lawrence and Carl Anthony Payne II generate laughs in a 1996 episode of "Martin."

being respected, I'm being shown love and I'm being honored."

"He's earned it many times over," says his "Bad Boys 2" co-star Gabrielle Union. "He played my big brother and literally treated me like a little sister for the last 20-plus years. I'm just incredibly proud of him — I'm just surprised that he didn't have [a star] already."

Despite his comedic pedigree, Lawrence freely admits he's not the funniest person in his raucous family. "My brother Robert, he's probably the funniest, but my grandmother, Nana, she was so funny, and my mother," he says. "So I just took to comedy early on. I was always clowning, and then as I started getting older, I was able to make my friends laugh in the streets." As a teen, he attracted crowds in his native Washington, D.C., area to watch his merciless takedowns — which onlookers loved even when he targeted them.

A fateful late-night cable viewing of "Richard Pryor: Live on the Sunset Strip" cemented his future path. "I was supposed to be in bed getting ready for school," he remembers. "I went to my mother and I told her, 'This is what I want to do, acting and stand-up.' And she said, 'Well, that's a hard field

that you want to go into. That's very difficult."

"I told her, 'Mama, either I make it in comedy or I don't make it at all.' And then she gave me her blessing. So I gave myself no options."

Lawrence says that when he decided making people laugh was his only way forward, he knew he would have to attack a career in comedy with laser-focus. "I felt like if I followed my path that I was on and keep trying and get in doors and opportunities and seize the moments that I could do something," he says.

He honed his innate talent on comedy club stages. "The first time I ever got on, I bombed bad! And I thought I would never get on stage again," he laughs. "But I knew I was better than that." He made a point of carefully studying the nuances of the best professional comics "until I got the urge and the courage to get back on stage."

He swiftly ascended the ranks of other hopefuls from rookie comic to emcee to headliner. He also took an improv class that comedy superstar Eddie Murphy, another role model, had reportedly taken, plus joined a traveling musical theater group, and nabbed a star-

ring role in his 10th-grade play. Honing his particular comedy style — often raunchy and always real — Lawrence learned early on to trust his instincts.

"A lot of the comedy club owners were telling me I was too vulgar — I couldn't say this, I couldn't say that," he says. "They wanted me to change my act and probably be more like Bill Cosby, safe and clean and whatever. I wanted to be like Richard Pryor and Eddie Murphy. I wanted to say what I wanted to say, and that's what I stuck to. I believed in it, and I believed there was an audience for it — and there was."

"If Eddie could do it, if Richard could do it, I believed I could do it," he says. "And nobody could tell me I couldn't."

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If Eddie could do it, if Richard could do it, I believed I could do it. And nobody could tell me I couldn't." — Martin Lawrence

Along the way, Lawrence lit a spark in an entire generation of comics. "Martin Lawrence inspired me to be who I am," says Tracy Morgan, who considers himself as much Lawrence's protégé as his friend.

"I was already funny, but me and my brother went to see Martin on 'Def Jam' and four months later I was on a stage with him performing. Literally," Morgan adds. "Martin Lawrence is my OG. He let me eat at his table. He just said, 'Don't be greedy — share.' Martin Lawrence taught me a lot."

Stand-up — including performing to crowds of as many as 18,000 people in his hometown of Lando-ver, Md. — prepared him for the early breakout opportunities that followed: a "Star Search" run and regular stints on "Def Jam" led to scene-stealing roles in films like "House Party" and "Do the Right Thing." Chris Albrecht at HBO soon connected him with writer John Bowman and the two concocted his sitcom "Martin" at Lawrence's house.

The show became a ratings juggernaut on Fox, bolstering the then still-nascent network against its more established rivals, and proved as pivotal to a new wave of Black-led TV comedies as "The Cosby Show" had been a decade earlier. "I was just doing me, and I was trying to come off as real as possible just by being natural," he says. "We went for it every week to give them laughs and just keep it real."

Viewers developed a special affection for Martin's secondary role on the show, weave-wearing hairstylist Sheneneh Jenkins. "I don't know if the demand surprised me because she's so funny

TO OUR BROTHER FROM ANOTHER MOTHER

MARTIN LAWRENCE,

**YOU ARE ONE OF THE FUNNIEST
AND KINDEST AND MOST
TALENTED HUMAN BEINGS ON
THE PLANET. IT'S NO SURPRISE
YOU'RE GETTING A STAR ON THE
HOLLYWOOD WALK OF FAME.**

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-Will Smith and the Westbrook Squad



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ON RECEIVING A STAR ON
the Hollywood Walk of Fame





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MARTIN LAWRENCE

ON RECEIVING HIS STAR
ON THE HOLLYWOOD WALK OF FAME



and she's so real," he says. "Shene-neh's my sister, she's my nieces, so I love playing her and I knew people would take to her and her attitudes and all that." Shene-neh's appeal inspired a love for prosthetics and wigs that would later lead him to conceive the scrappy, relatable title character in the blockbuster "Big Momma's House" franchise. "She reminds you of everybody's grandmother or mother, and has heart. She's endearing, and she's spunky."

On film, Lawrence particularly relished sharing the screen in "Life" with Eddie Murphy, a hero he'd once driven two hours to see perform stand-up. "I just drove back home saying to myself, 'I've got work to do,'" he laughs. "And then I wound up working with him. I know it could only be but God that sent that blessing my way."

Screen partnerships, like with Murphy in "Life" and especially Will Smith in the "Bad Boys" films, proved crucial to his creative growth. "It's fun to be the funny man," he says, "but when it's time to be the straight man, be

the straight man. And with partners like Eddie Murphy and Will Smith that are great at what they do, it just makes for great chemistry." He remembers thinking "Bad Boys" was a dream project "because it was able to be able to show a real side of me, other things that I could do — not just comedy but some drama, some whooping some ass!"

"It was a fun team, the three of us," filmmaker Michael Bay recalls of making the first "Bad Boys" film, recalling the studio's little faith in him as a first-time director, and not much more support for Lawrence and Smith as leading men. "I have really fond memories of that movie because they treated the three of us so bad. It's literally the greatest training ground, when no one believes in what you're doing and they say it's not going to work."

"Martin's a comic genius," Bay continues, recalling how he would "wind up" the comedian in between scenes to heighten Lawrence's hysterical responses by instructing Smith to call Lawrence a "bitch" in a scene when

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Comedians, they always have to come back with the best lines. And you can see him coming up with a joke live on camera that brings the house down.” — Michael Bay

it clearly rankled him. "Comedians, they never want to lose. They always have to come back with the best lines. And you can see him coming up with a joke live on camera that brings the house down. He goes, 'I'll drive off this fucking cliff. It will be two bitches in the sea.'"

Amid his meteoric successes, Lawrence would also stumble occasionally, generating distressing headlines that reported health crises and erratic behavior. "I got through it through faith, through family and close friends that loved and cared about me

and that took me up under their wing and supported me... and told me this was right and this was wrong," says Lawrence, who also credits his devoted audience for reigniting his creative drive. "I probably was depressed and lost energy for what I was doing, but I got that back. My fans helped me get that back."

Following the worldwide box office haul of \$424.6 million for "Bad Boys for Life" and a fourth film in the works, Lawrence is contemplating a full-circle return to the stand-up stage. "I believe God will let me know when that time is right, when He is ready for me to get back out there and speak my piece," he says. "I just want it to be fun and insightful and people to laugh and take their minds away from crazy stuff."

Lawrence says that's a course he means to follow in all facets of his career going forward. "The challenges will be what they will, but I'm up for them," he says. "This chapter of my life is just about putting out good work and doing good things and being a light and a vessel for people." Currently, the only detour he'll take from "Bad Boys 4" is to hit Hollywood Boulevard for that star — but it will be a short one.

"It's about focus and being ready, and staying ready," he says. "We'll celebrate for a minute — but then it's time to get back to work." 🎯

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Martin Lawrence,
left, and
Will Smith in
1995's "Bad Boys."



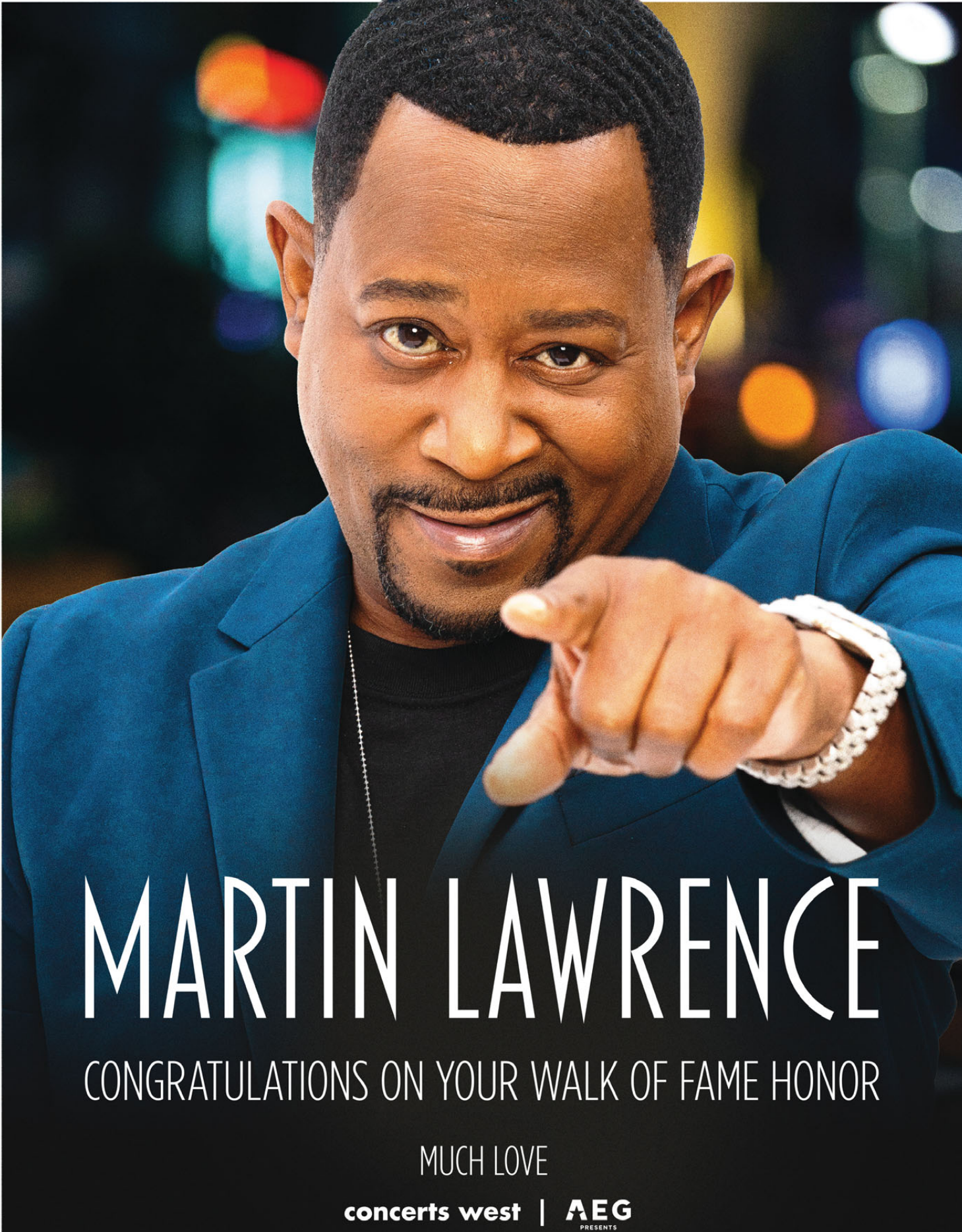
TIPSHEET

WHAT: Martin Lawrence receives star on Hollywood Walk of Fame

WHEN: 11:30 a.m., April 20

WHERE: 6617 Hollywood Blvd.

WEB: walkoffame.com



MARTIN LAWRENCE

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Martin Lawrence's Greatest Hits

Star's career spans film and TV hits • By Brent Simon

Martin Lawrence first cut his teeth on the stand-up circuit, but his innate charisma, good looks and engaging blend of self-effacing humor and high-energy physical comedy made him a great fit for film and television roles. Some highlights below:

Martin

1992-97

The Fox sitcom, the raucous beachhead from which Lawrence launched his mainstream career, cast him as a Detroit deejay caught between unbridled



Martin Lawrence packs a punch in the 2006 hit comedy "Big Momma's House 2."

macho posturing and a secretly yearned-for domestication. Co-created by Lawrence, the series allowed him to play both a down-to-earth leading man and a panorama of colorful supporting characters. Among the latter, Lawrence memorably channeled the spirit of a number of female relatives into feisty salon owner Sheneneh, who would later be immortalized with the hip-hop dance the Nae Nae. A healthy five-year run (and syndication on no fewer than a half-dozen networks) have maintained its

status as one of Lawrence's most beloved projects.

You So Crazy

1994

Lawrence's stand-up concert debut generated headlines even before its release, forcing distributor Miramax to sell the NC-17 movie to Samuel Goldwyn, who eventually released it unrated to \$10 million in box office receipts. If some of his profane riffs on sex, fame, racism and social issues are unabashedly inspired by Eddie Murphy (whose iconic leather stage ensembles he evokes with his own attire), Lawrence's deeply personal reminiscences marked him a charismatic, observant storyteller.

Bad Boys

(1995, 2003 AND 2020 SEQUELS):

No franchise has defined Lawrence's big screen career more than "Bad Boys," starring opposite Will Smith. Both were dismissed as sitcom talents when they first teamed up with director Michael Bay for the R-rated buddy action

comedy about a pair of Miami cops trying to wrap up a drug bust. The low-budget, high-style movie was a runaway hit, grossing \$141 million and launching both of them to feature film stardom. Two sequels delivered increasingly brawny commercial returns (\$273 and \$427 million, respectively), setting the stage for a planned fourth franchise entry.

A Thin Line Between Love and Hate

1996

For his directorial debut, Lawrence portrayed a nightclub manager and ladies man who receives a brutal comeuppance for his misogynist ways after scorning an obsessed lover, Brandi (Lynn Whitfield). Allowing for some darker layers and surprising influences (its opening is a callback to "Sunset Boulevard"), the movie showcased the multi-hyphenate's versatility and grossed more than four times its \$8 million budget.

Big Momma's House

2000, 2006 AND 2011 SEQUELS

Coming on the heels of the previous fall's "Blue Streak," Lawrence's 2000 summer comedy indisputably proved his solo box office drawing power, this time playing an undercover FBI agent who poses as a scrappy grandmother to apprehend an escaped convict. Pulling in \$25.6 million in its debut weekend, the film stayed in the top 10 for seven consecutive weeks, earning \$174 million. Two sequels would extend the franchise's total box office receipts another \$224 million.

Wild Hogs

(2007):

Lawrence joined forces with John Travolta, Tim Allen and William H. Macy in this crowd-pleasing, \$254 million-grossing comedy, capitalizing on a then-nascent celebration of suburban biker culture to broaden the core fan bases of its performers. Lawrence's re-teaming with longtime "Martin" antagonist Tichina Arnold, this time as a married couple, provides more laughs. 🐷



We proudly congratulate
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MARTIN LAWRENCE

on receiving his well-deserved star
on the Hollywood Walk of Fame

A Cinematic Celebration

A look at this year's CinemaCon

honorees • By Nick Clement and Robert Marich

Every year, CinemaCon bestows honors on the people in front of the camera and behind the scenes during their annual convention. Here's a look at who is receiving accolades in 2023.



CINEMA CON PASSEPARTOUT AWARD
Niels Swinkels, Universal Pictures Intl.

An optimist about cinema despite the COVID catastrophe, even Swinkels is surprised by the size of snap-back. The recipient of CinemaCon's Passepartout Award for excellence in the international marketplace will receive his kudo at the International Day lunch and awards ceremony on April 24.

"What went beyond my expectations has been seeing box office records being broken so quickly after the pandemic, both locally and globally," says Swinkels, exec VP & managing director of Universal Pictures Intl. "For Universal, we've seen certain territories achieve the biggest animation grosses of all time for 'Minions: The Rise of Gru' and 'Puss in Boots: The Last Wish.'" Beyond that, "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" just opened strongly.

Based on the Universal Studios lot, Swinkels worked in film his entire professional career — eight years in Los Angeles, 11 years in London and seven years in Amsterdam. Born in the Netherlands, he joined the studio in 2004 and his responsibilities today encompass the entire international theatrical market.

Swinkels says he's hoping for a consistent supply of films in all genres and budgets, and that older audiences get back in the cinema groove, after avoiding crowds amid COVID health concerns.

As for boosting the film supply, reports suggest streamers Apple TV+ and Amazon Studios will invest in a steady stream of cinema-first movies. "Streamers coming into theatrical marketplace along with studio output could provide for that healthy volume," Swinkels says.



INTERNATIONAL FILMMAKERS OF THE YEAR
Andy Muschietti and Barbara Muschietti

The Muschietti siblings ("Mama," "It," "It Chapter Two") are about to see the release of their long-gestating Warner Brothers/DCEU project, "The Flash," which hits screens on June 16 amid intense fan speculation stoked by an action-packed trailer that features multiple Batmen (Michael Keaton and Ben Affleck make appearances), as well as the titular character portrayed by Ezra Miller showing off time-warping superpowers. "The Flash" "is part of a bigger mythology, the DCU, and like many mythologies, it brings people together," says Andy Muschietti, who believes audiences will be excited to watch the movie on the big screen. He and his sibling will receive their award at the International Day lunch and awards ceremony on April 24.

The pricey film made headlines recently when Tom Cruise had a personal screening of Andy Muschietti's latest directorial offering, with the star apparently going so far as to personally call the helmer to offer his ecstatic praise. With theater owners clamoring for a blockbuster, this first attempt at a multiverse concept for the DCEU could become just that, which would serve as a welcome near-swan-song, as the old regime's roster of big screen adventures is coming to a close later this year. Regardless of the recent behind-the-scenes turmoil that has hit DC's theatrical slate and Miller himself, "The Flash" appears to be just what audiences are craving — a colorful and broadly appealing, four-quadrant global entertainment that combines humor and action.



COMSCORE INTERNATIONAL
BOX OFFICE ACHIEVEMENT

“Avatar: The Way of Water”

Many predicted the “Avatar” sequel would be a box office disappointment. Now, \$2.3 billion in global B.O. later, the persistent early sniping seems quaint: “Avatar: The Way of Water” premiered domestically with a \$134 million weekend. The sequel, which ranks as No. 3 in all-time worldwide box office, will be honored at the International Day lunch and awards ceremony on April 24 and accepted by Jeffrey Forman, senior VP, Intl. Theatrical Distribution, Disney Entertainment.

Comscore senior media analyst Paul Dergarabedian points out that the James Cameron-created sci-fi epic arrived at a pivotal moment. “We had a downturn in the fall and if ‘Avatar’ hadn’t performed as well as it did [in December], it would have been a huge blow for the industry as a whole,” recalls Dergarabedian. “Then, the summer 2022 movies that were such a massive upturn from the previous summer would have been seen more as an aberration, and not a trend.”

There were plenty of jitters back in December, even though the “Avatar” sequel’s \$134 million eclipsed the \$77 million domestic weekend opening of the original adventure 13 years earlier. Besides rescuing the December holiday season, “Avatar: The Way of Water” rolled up big box office that pumped up the first quarter of 2023. Comscore Movies head of global revenue Michael Viane, who will present the award at CinemaCon, says that put consumers in a cinema state-of-mind, extending a halo effect to later releases that prospered. “I don’t think that’s just an accident,” Viane says of later films clicking.



GLOBAL ACHIEVEMENT IN
EXHIBITION AWARD

EVT-Event Cinemas

Multinational exhibitor Event Cinemas sells experiences, not just tickets, and will receive CinemaCon’s Global Achievement in Exhibition Award. The award will be accepted by Jane Hastings, managing director and CEO of leisure conglomerate EVT on April 24.

Cinema’s traditional focus on sight and sound leads to theaters that can be “all too similar, almost cookie-cutter in nature,” observes Hastings.

After researching consumer preferences, EVT “offers diverse seat experiences and price points within each auditorium, so we can cater to all types of audiences,” says Hastings. These include its Boutique configuration with an art gallery vibe, its Gold Class providing in-seat services and Your Cinema, Your Way that offers daybed seating. Those amenities and customization pull high revenues.

The company draws consumer insights from across EVT businesses that Hastings oversees: restaurants/bars, resorts, hotel management and travel services. EVT stands for Entertainment, Ventures and Travel. Its Events Cinemas encompass 497 screens in Australia, 144 screens in New Zealand and 373 screens in Germany (the CineStar circuit), and also tech-services provider Edge Content & Technology.

Based in Sydney, Hastings has hands-on experience running movie theaters earlier in her career and is originally from New Zealand. She is chairperson of the NATO Intl. Committee, sits on the executive committee of the Global Cinema Federation (GCF) based in Belgium and is a former New Zealand Film Commission board member.



STATE OF THE INDUSTRY
NATO MARQUEE AWARD

**Rolando Rodriguez,
The Marcus Corp.**

Rodriguez has a riddle for CinemaCon. What three audience demographics consistently account for well over 50% of domestic box office, from just 38% of the population.

Give up?

Hispanics, Blacks and Asians massively over-index in cinema. “Hollywood is really starting to recognize the importance of this,” says Rodriguez, who points to movies like “Black Panther.” As for his Hispanic kin, he adds, “This is a demo that is really growing and that *loves* going to the movies.”

In October 2022, Rodriguez retired as chairman, president and CEO of Marcus Theatres, and remains chairman of the National Assn. of Theatre Owners (NATO) through October. At age 15, he began as a ticket taker and concession worker. Rodriguez joined Marcus in 2013, having held posts previously at AMC Theatres, Rave Cinemas (now part of Cinemark) and taking a detour as a Walmart executive.

He remains a senior advisor to Marcus, and personally shuttles between Marcus headquarters in Milwaukee; Scottsdale, Ariz.; and Dallas, where he is senior advisor and small shareholder in Influx Worldwide. Influx provides consumer-facing technology and digital services to the cinema, restaurant and other industries.

Rodriguez also serves on the board of the Global Cinema Federation based in Belgium. He’ll be honored April 25 during the state of the industry.



Zendaya
STAR OF THE YEAR

Few talents have been burning brighter than Zendaya, still riding high off the spectacular box office successes of 2021's "Spiderman: No Way Home" and "Dune," as she awaits the release of "Dune: Part Two," which arrives in theaters on Nov. 3. She's become a household name thanks to her gritty and award winning work on HBO's "Euphoria," and on Sept. 15, she'll be seen in Luca Guadagnino's romantic sports dramedy for MGM, "Challengers," playing a tennis player turned coach who has transformed her husband from a mediocre player into a grand slam champion. She'll be honored April 27 at the CinemaCon Big Screen Achievement Awards.

Melissa McCarthy
CINEMA VÉRITÉ AWARD:

Melissa McCarthy has been able to harness her love of comedic improv ("Bridesmaids" remains a classic for a reason) while displaying a gift for real-world drama ("Can You Ever Forgive Me?") and still being able to flex her blockbuster muscles: She appears as the villainous Ursula in Rob Marshall's big-budget, live-action retelling of Disney's animated classic "The Little Mermaid," which washes up in theaters May 26. She also has a supporting role in Jerry Seinfeld's upcoming dramedy centering on the battle for breakfast pastry supremacy, "Unfrosted: The Pop-Tart Story," which Netflix will release in 2023. She'll be honored April 27 at the CinemaCon Big Screen Achievement Awards.



Anthony Ramos and Dominique Fishback
RISING STARS OF THE YEAR

Ramos got his start in the dual roles of John Laurens and Philip Hamilton in the Broadway musical "Hamilton" before moving on to the big screen, appearing in 2018's "A Star Is Born," and 2021's "In the Heights." This summer, he stars in the sci-fi action blockbuster "Transformers: Rise of the Beasts." He's also got the Gamestop scandal dramedy "Dumb Money" hitting screens in October, and the sci-fi comedy "Distant" set for 2024. Fishback will also appear in the new "Transformers" and is currently starring in Amazon Prime's buzzy horror

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Anthony Ramos and Dominique Fishback will be honored with rising stars award at CinemaCon on April 27.



series "Swarm." An actor and playwright, Fishback has racked up notable appearances on shows including "Show Me a Hero," "The Deuce," "The Last Days of Ptolemy Grey," and the feature "Judas and the Black Messiah," the latter of which earned her a BAFTA nomination. They'll be honored April 27 at the CinemaCon Big Screen Achievement Awards.

"Joy Ride" Cast:
Ashley Park, Sabrina Wu, Stephanie Hsu and Sherry Cola
COMEDY ENSEMBLE AWARD

The upcoming comedy "Joy Ride," from screenwriter turned director Adele Lim and co-writers Cherry Chevapravatdumrong ("Family Guy," "The Orville") and Teresa Hsiao ("American Dad," "Awkwafina Is Nora From Queens"), has break-out potential written all over it. The narrative centers on four Asian American friends, played by Park, Wu, Hsu and Cola, who bond as a unit while traveling through Asia in search of one of their birth mothers. The actors created a tremendous sense of chemistry with each other, both onscreen and off, which gives the piece a distinct level of heart. Says Park, "Joyride's" premiere at SXSW was my first time watching the film alongside an audience. It was incredibly moving to watch in a crowd of all demographics as they roared in laughter and shook with emotion in unison... it made me realize how grateful I am that Lionsgate and Point Grey prioritized a theatrical release for our film, because I think the most fulfilling part storytelling is to make those in the audience feel less lonely." They'll be honored April 27.

Christopher Nolan and Emma Thomas
NATO SPIRIT OF THE INDUSTRY AWARD

Few filmmakers have strived more to give audiences something new, special and inherently cinematic as writer-producer-director Nolan and producer Thomas. On July 21, their latest feature, "Oppenheimer," will be released. The film explores the life of the titular physicist (played by



Cillian Murphy) as he works with a team of dedicated scientists during World War II in the Manhattan Project. Nolan, who has always been outspoken about the importance of seeing films in theaters, has an extraordinary box-office track record. Universal Pictures is backing the \$100 million "Oppenheimer," and hopes to have both an audience-pleasing hit as well as multiple-category Oscar contender on their hands. They'll be honored April 27.

Chris Meledandri
AWARD OF EXCELLENCE IN ANIMATION

As the CEO of the booming animation behemoth, Illumination, Meledandri has overseen a string of hits, including the "Despicable Me" franchise, "The Secret Life of Pets" and the "Sing" franchise. While not part of the Illumination brand, he served as an executive producer on last year's "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish," which has grossed close to \$500 million worldwide. Currently playing in theaters worldwide is the box office hit "The Super Mario Bros. Movie," the long-awaited big screen adaptation of the classic Nintendo video game series, featuring some of the most iconic digital characters ever created. Upcoming projects that have been announced by Illumination include "Migration," which arrives in theaters this Christmas, and centers on a family of ducks who try to convince their overprotective father to go on the vacation of a lifetime. And the surefire hit "Despicable Me 4" has been pegged for 2024. He'll be honored April 27. 🎬



Next Gen Marketing

The ever-changing interests of younger audiences are top of mind for marketing experts.

• By Karen Idelson

As marketing experts prepare for this year's *Variety* Entertainment Marketing Summit presented by Deloitte, many are focused on discovering new ways to create authentic relationships with consumers. While contemporary culture evolves faster than ever and the tastes of Gen Z and Gen Alpha are continually shifting, finding new ways to reach audiences has never been more challenging.

"People are just consuming our messaging in a thousand different ways," says Ellene V. Miles, senior VP, intersectional marketing, Sony Pictures Entertainment/Motion Picture Group. "So that sort of blanket one size fits all approach isn't as viable. I think being authentic to these audi-

ences and meeting them where they live and meeting them with messaging that really speaks to them is critical to success, critical to awareness, and critical to the whole theatrical proposition."

Ian Trombetta, senior VP of social and influence marketing for the National Football League, has partnered with digital creators to help NFL players reach their fans across the social media landscape. This gives fans unprecedented access.

"We've activated over one hundred social creatives across the country to film and work with [the players] year-round, to create this great content that we feed through our channels," says Trombetta. "Just starting with the diversity of our content, it looks vastly differ-

ent than it did three, four or five years ago, and it really is tailored to each platform. The other thing that we're doing now, more than ever, is working with this democratization of celebrity and fandom. It's vast to look at because fans want that look into the lives of the players. It's also daunting to think about, because literally anyone can go viral at any time."

Catherine Halaby, head of entertainment, North America, at TikTok, is also constantly monitoring her platform to spot emerging trends and keep up with creators who are reshaping pop culture every hour on the hour. The key is giving a voice to creators that audiences see as real.

"You get next-level engagement when you let a creator express

their voice on behalf of a title or studio," says Halaby.

Generations who are coming into their own have a finely tuned sense of each platform. They are also true digital natives who make each channel their own.

"In marketing, we spend a lot of time getting to know Gen Z and Gen Alpha and we know they have high expectations for their experiences with our brands both in and out of games," says David Tinson, CMO at Electronic Arts. "They've always known limitless content, which means any experience they have with us needs to grab them, hook them and meet them exactly where they are. If it doesn't do that quickly and without friction, they will move on. They have fast and smart filters." Lately, some creators have been challenged by bumpy economics. Kim Larson, global head of YouTube Creators at YouTube, believes users can continue to find new ways to monetize their content in a difficult economy by coming at the issue in new ways.

"In addition to YouTube's long-standing revenue opportunities through our Partner Programs, our creators are also leaning into YouTube's 10 alternative monetization tools, taking advantage of new opportunities through Shorts and Shopping, and becoming the entrepreneurs and business moguls of today," says Larson.

Creators and platforms are using data in more precise ways than ever to get feedback. Interpreting that data and finding ways to act on it has become fundamental to success.

"You get a much better sense now of how entertainment culture and brands intersect in the day-to-day life of the average consumer," says Jay Tucker, executive director for the Center of Media, Entertainment and Sports at the UCLA Anderson School of Management. "Things get very interesting very quickly because the new entertainment experiences and platforms inform the way that brands reach consumers through entertainment experiences." 🎯

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David Tinson, Jay Tucker, Kim Larson, Ellene V. Miles, Catherine Halaby and Ian Trombetta will all speak at *Variety's* marketing summit.



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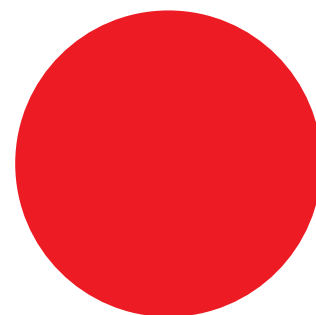


REVIEWS

Mrs. Davis

By Alison Herman

Betty Gilpin plays Sister Simone, a nun on a quest for the Holy Grail, in "Mrs. Davis."



TV REVIEW

Sci-fi: Peacock (8 episodes; all reviewed); April 20

Starring: Betty Gilpin, Jake McDorman, Andy McQueen



The Holy Grail, a character in "Mrs. Davis" observes, might be the "most overused MacGuffin ever." From "Monty Python" to "Indiana Jones," the mythical chalice is an easy shorthand for a magical object that motivates heroes and antagonists alike. Sister Simone (Betty Gilpin), a nun who spends her days making strawberry jam at an abbey outside Reno, is the latest protagonist to set her sights on the Grail. She's been assigned this quest by an artificial intelligence known as Mrs. Davis, which marries the menace of Skynet with the affable mien of Alexa. For reasons both principled and personal, Simone despises Mrs. Davis, but she's been extended an offer she can't refuse: If she finds the Grail and destroys it, Mrs. Davis will destroy herself. As the same supporting player notes: "Algorithms love clichés, and there's no cliché bigger than the quest for the Holy Grail."

Jake McDorman
plays Sister
Simone's ex,
an anti-AI
resistance leader.



Viewers might appreciate the use of such a simple, ubiquitous symbol in the Peacock series, which otherwise seems to revel in absurd, surreal set-pieces designed to disorient. Between an endurance contest involving a giant sword (it's called "Excalibattle"), an interdimensional open relationship and a heist contingent on a tool dubbed "the Constipator," the Holy Grail acts as an anchor to a recognizable form of alternate reality: basic, familiar and easy to understand. "Mrs. Davis" may wink at the influence of AI on modern storytelling, which only looms larger with the rise of tools like ChatGPT; all eight episodes bear nonsense titles, like "Mother of Mercy: The Call of the Horse" and "A Great Place to Drink to Gain Control of Your Drink," that are themselves generated by a machine. But in its inventiveness, "Mrs. Davis" acts as an antidote to the programming-by-numbers

and algorithm appeasement that's becoming common in the streaming age — even when such lunacy sometimes outstrips its ability to tell a totally cohesive story.

The show is co-created by Tara Hernandez, an alum of "The Big Bang Theory," and Damon Lindelof, whose post-"Lost" CV is marked by increasingly audacious takes on faith in the near future. Like "The Leftovers" and "Watchmen," "Mrs. Davis" has a playful tone that helps counter its metaphysical scope. Our introduction to its world comes via one Dr. Schrodinger (Ben Chaplin), who's been stranded on a desert island since before Mrs. Davis ended famine, war and all competing social media platforms. (A rescuer brings him, and by extension us, up to speed.) Naturally, Schrodinger has a cat.

Grounding all these antics is Gilpin, stepping into her first series lead role since the early, unjust cancellation of "Glow." As Simone, the actor is a skeptical center of gravity. To her, Mrs. Davis is "it," never "she" — let alone "Mum" or "Mama," as the program is known abroad. The nun's animosity is more than just that of a believer toward the Catholic Church's competition; as Simone tells Jay (Andy McQueen), a mysterious figure who runs a falafel joint, she also blames Mrs. Davis for the death of her father, a local magician. But she's just as wary of her ex, Wiley (Jake McDorman), the self-styled leader of the

anti-AI resistance. Nothing instills a healthy bullshit detector like knowing from birth that "magic" tricks are anything but.

In appearance and attitude, Simone bears a strong resemblance to Angela Abar of "Watchmen," who was played by Regina King. Angela, too, kicked ass while wearing a habit, under the moniker Sister Night. She also helped puncture the madness around her by asking questions on the audience's behalf, chief among them, "What the fuck?" — a direct quote from both series. Such a surrogate comes in handy as Simone and Wiley's mission sends them across the ocean and into the depths of the Vatican, where they encounter exploding heads, a cult of female bankers and a sneaker-based conspiracy. It's a lot of exposition that is frankly far too much to keep track of. Gilpin nonetheless gives us something to grab on to, especially in scenes with Simone's mother, Celeste (Elizabeth Marvel), whose grief takes the form of extreme denial. Beneath jokes about reading Ayn Rand to her daughter as a child, there's a conflict with more human-scale stakes than technology versus religion.

"Mrs. Davis" lacks the sanctimony and self-seriousness that can weigh down "Black Mirror," the dystopian anthology that makes for an obvious point of comparison. Instead, the series combines the gleeful blasphemy of "The Young Pope" with the screwy sci-

ence fiction of "Made for Love," a show abruptly canceled in a move that may bode poorly for mass appeal here. "Mrs. Davis" doesn't actually depict its title character; other people interface directly with the AI, but Simone and Wiley speak only to its "proxies," random users — a kindergarten teacher, a living statue — who volunteer to act as messengers. The device is eerie and effective, turning Mrs. Davis into a many-headed Hydra with eyes and ears all over. It also obscures our understanding of the plot's primary mover, though certain subplots depend on grasping trivia like "wings," the Mrs. Davis version of a blue checkmark. For better and for worse, "Mrs. Davis" puts spectacle over practicality.

Whatever its faults, the series takes a stand against the soulless, generic world its characters fear a total AI takeover would produce. Mrs. Davis is a threat to the uncertainty that inspires religious faith, or the sense of wonder that gives an illusionist his impact; Wiley's right-hand man JQ (Chris Diamantopoulos) is a former poker player whose livelihood has been destroyed. Simply by existing, "Mrs. Davis" fends off that nightmare scenario in our own universe by at least another day. When viewed in that light, some messiness is forgivable — and even part of the plan. **D**

CREDITS: Executive producers: Tara Hernandez, Damon Lindelof, Owen Harris, Alethea Jones, Eugene Kelly, 60 MIN. **Cast:** Betty Gilpin, Jake McDorman, Andy McQueen, Ben Chaplin, Elizabeth Marvel, Chris Diamantopoulos



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Quasi

By Todd Gilchrist



FILM REVIEW

Director: Kevin Heffernan

Starring: Adrianna Palicki, Jay Chandrasekhar, Kevin Heffernan, Steve Lemme

Not to be confused with an adaptation of “The Hunchback of Notre-Dame,” comedy troupe Broken Lizard’s “Quasi” tells a story that’s truer to the Oxford definition of its title than the 1831 Victor Hugo novel that inspired it. Kevin Heffernan settles uneasily into the director’s seat usually occupied by colleague Jay Chandrasekhar for an underdog story more interested in leveraging funny pronunciations of French words for underwhelming laughs than in creating real characters — much less a visual backdrop that doesn’t look like a second-rate Renaissance Faire.

Set in a 13th-century France that narrator and sometime Broken Lizard collaborator Brian Cox helpfully informs us “sucked,” the film centers on Quasimodo (Steve Lemme), a social outcast tasked by King Guy (Chandrasekhar) with murdering Pope Cornelius (Paul Soter) after winning an audience with him in the Papal Lottery. But when he finally meets the pope, Quasi receives conflicting orders to kill Guy instead.

Catherine (Adrianna Palicki), Guy’s thoughtful new queen,



helps Quasi hatch a plan to disappear, but he gets captured by the king’s guard and sentenced to death — that is, until Catherine makes a fateful discovery that promises to change the course of French history.

Given that this project is piloted by Broken Lizard, it’s clear that “Quasi” is meant to be a comedy, but there are enough long stretches where no jokes are even attempted that you’d be forgiven for thinking that laughs were only an incidental goal. Though the writing smartly excises gags making fun of the title character’s disfigurement, little is inserted in their place except for exaggerated pronunciations of words like “croissant.”

The fact that the film was made inexpensively, though not a vice in itself, is not especially com-

pensated for by Joe Collins’ cinematography, which renders Heffernan’s compositions flat, stagy and small. Otherwise, the story’s tether to Hugo’s novel or general historical precedent is almost nonexistent, reducing palace intrigue and peasant uprisings to window dressing for the core troupe members to play against one another in multiple roles.

While Steve Lemme exudes convincing charm as the title character, only Broken Lizard ensemble outsider Adrianna Palicki finds the right balance between “commitment to the bit” and winking self-awareness, bringing a palpable intelligence but also go-along fun to her role as a royal who feels more comfortable with the oddball commoners. Chandrasekhar stands out as the entitled, casually cruel King Guy, but

the rest of the ensemble’s members languish in dual roles that would have been better served by more inventive casting.

The film’s shortcomings feel even more egregious in the shadow of Mel Brooks’ recent “History of the World, Part II,” which not only broadly surpasses the imagination used here but serves as a much better example of how to deconstruct period events with modern humor. But ultimately, even in a cinematic landscape that is especially starved for comedy, Broken Lizard’s latest feels more like a tax shelter than an oasis. Less “Monty Python and the Holy Grail” than a sub-“Not Another French Gothic Novel Adaptation” parody, “Quasi” squanders an opportunity to give Hugo’s iconic character an overdue glow-up, instead settling for a version that won’t even ring a bell to the people already familiar with his story.

Steve Lemme plays a hapless hunchback caught up in a murder plot in “Quasi.”

CREDITS: A Searchlight Pictures release of a Broken Lizard Industries and Cataland Films production. **Producers:** Jay Chandrasekhar, Kevin Heffernan, Phil Hudson, Sam Hurwitz, Steve Lemme, Matthew Medlin, Richard Perello, Paul Soter, Erik Stolhanske. **Director:** Kevin Heffernan. **Screenplay:** Broken Lizard (Jay Chandrasekhar, Kevin Heffernan, Steve Lemme, Paul Soter, Erik Stolhanske). **Camera:** Joe Collins. **Editor:** Frank McGrath. **Music:** Jason Akana. Reviewed online, Los Angeles, April 9, 2023. **MPA Rating:** R. **Running time:** 99 MIN. **Cast:** Adrianna Palicki, Jay Chandrasekhar, Kevin Heffernan, Steve Lemme, Paul Soter, Erik Stolhanske, Eugene Cordero

Billy Harris

“What I loved the most is a community felt represented in their favorite TV show.”

By Jenelle Riley

Shortly before Billy Harris landed the role of footballer Colin Hughes on the Apple TV+ smash “Ted Lasso,” he found himself without representation when his agent left the company. Rather than be discouraged, he sent a note to casting director Theo Park asking to be kept in mind for an upcoming project. “Lo and behold, a day later, this email came in about a show called ‘Ted Lasso,’” Harris recalls.

Now Harris is at the epicenter of a major storyline. It all began in Season 2 when Colin made a passing comment about the gay dating website Grindr; fans began to speculate about the character’s sexuality. The third episode of Season 3 confirmed that Colin was gay and in a relationship with a man named Michael, played by Sam Liu. In the show’s just-released sixth episode, Colin is discovered at a gay bar in Amsterdam by journalist Trent Crimm (James Lance). Trent reveals that he’s known Colin’s secret for some time, and proves to be a sympathetic listener as the two discuss the challenges of living in the public eye.

● **At what point did they tell you that you were going to have a significant storyline in the current season?** In Season 2, I was doing a little more here and there as my character was developing, and I was very happy. Then there came the line about Grindr. And I read that and said, “That’s a story in itself. A young guy on a football team talking

Things you didn’t know about Billy Harris



Age: 29

Hometown: Southend-on-Sea, Essex, England

Broad horizons: He’s working on an animated series for Apple TV+, and he’d love to appear on Broadway or in a Western.



about Grindr.” So I realized, this is something that may flourish in the future.

● **Did you speak to any of the show’s creators at that point about what this might mean?** Yeah, we had a discussion. They said it wasn’t necessarily something that was going to happen

straight away in Season 2 because the ensemble was huge and there’s a lot of storylines and characters. So I think it was just a case of waiting for the right moment to see the real Colin.

● **When the Grindr line was spoken in Season 2, social media immediately picked up on it.**

Yes! And what I loved the most — what I felt like from the moment the line was said — is a community felt represented in their favorite TV show. And I have nothing but love and loyalty and gratitude to every Colin Hughes fan, because they’ve been there from that moment. I’ve read pretty much every tweet, which I know I shouldn’t do, but I just love Colin, and to see that support from other people is just really, really nice.

● **It seems like the response has been overwhelmingly positive. That must mean a lot.** I’ve spoken to some amazing people. People basically saying that they wish their younger self could have watched this. I’ve had so many people telling me: “I loved football, but I was also gay in school, and I knew well the prejudices that go hand in hand with being gay and being a footballer. To have watched this would have really helped me.” That’s been amazing. It’s been so lovely to see the responses to the story.

● **The “Ted Lasso” cast recently visited the White House to discuss mental health. What do you say when you meet President Joe Biden?** You say, “Hello, Mr. President.” And you shake his hand and you smile. It was amazing to get to be a part of that. I just feel so lucky that this is the kind of show that appeals to so many people, including the president of the United States. Never in my life did I imagine I’d be at the White House. And we got to go bowling! 🎳

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